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SURE SHOT SETH, THE Boy Rifleman; OR, THE Young Patriots of the North. BY OLL COOMES.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPY IN THE LOG.

AN August night of the year 1862 hung over the forests of Minnesota.

The sky was overcast with a leaden-gray mist, and the pale moon looked feebly to earth.

The river rolled on through the purple shadows, whispering low and sullenly to the stately pines, its faithful sentinels of centuries gone.

Through the woods bordering on the Minnesota river, and contiguous to the Yellowstone Agency, a figure was gliding noiselessly along—a human figure—that of a boy with bright



DROPPING THE BUTT OF HIS RIFLE TO THE GROUND, SURE SHOT SETH, THE BOY RIFLEMAN AND SPY, LISTENED.

blue eyes and strong, prepossessing features. He was light in form and lithe of limb, and darted onward through the gloom as though it were his own element. He seemed perfectly familiar with his course, and dodged in and out of the tangled mazes of the grim old wood and along the sinuous windings of the valleys like a hound upon the trail.

At length he drew up in the forest under some stately pines, where the darkness seemed to have been born of infinity. Dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman and Spy, listened.

"To-whit-to-whoo-hoo-oo-oo!" rung from the tree overhead.

Seth shook his head thoughtfully.

"I never like to hear an owl hoot," he said to himself, "for it's a bad sign."

He sat down on a hollow log, and after the owl's cry came a deep and profound silence—a silence that became painful and foreboding to the youth.

Again the old owl overhead sent forth his hoarse notes quavering upon the air; and the sound was immediately followed by a scrambling among the branches, as upon heavy wing the bird went lumbering away through the night.

Then a silence profound as the grave followed.

"Ah," mused Seth, "that frightened cry and flight of the owl, and this terrible silence have a meaning."

He started to his feet as he spoke. He had been trained in the lore of the woods and night, and could read the sounds of each like an open book, and interpret their meaning and portents. The silence that succeeded the warning cry of that cowardly old sentinel of the night, the owl, convinced him that danger was approaching. He bent his head and listened intently.

Off in the direction of the river he heard the heavy tread of feet.

"They're comin', sure as death!" the youth said to himself, then he dropped to the ground and crept into the hollow log upon which he had been seated.

The footsteps approached and paused under the great pines within a few feet of the log. The boy knew they were the steps of booted feet, and had some idea to whom they belonged. He pressed his ear to the orifice and listened. To and fro beneath the branching trees he heard the unknown pacing with restless impatience.

Presently he heard voices in conversation, and then a faint beam of light streamed into the log.

He applied his eyes to the hole again and, in the light of a pocket-lantern, saw four persons standing, and looking like Titan figures in the gloaming.

Three of them Seth recognized as the notorious Sioux chiefs, Little Crow, Inkpaduta, and Little Priest. The fourth was a white man, whose long hair, broad-brimmed hat, peculiar garb, and general appearance were characteristic of no other class of men than the wealthy planters of the Southern States.

"So you have kept your appointment," said the white man, raising the lantern and scanning each face before him with knitted brows.

"Little Crow is a great chief," said the redoubtable chief himself, "and never breaks his word with his friends."

The other two answered in the same words.

"I am glad to hear this, chiefs, for it gives me greater strength," replied the white man. "I have come from the sunny land of the South to confer with my red brothers; are they ready to listen—are there no enemies' ears near us?"

"The trees have ears, and the wind sometimes tells secrets," answered Little Crow.

"Then you do not deem this a safe place to consult?"

"No; the night-jar screamed with affright, and shot into the sky when he passed near here. He is the spirit that warns the red-man when darkness hides dangers from his eyes. There are safer places than this to talk," replied the chief.

"Let my red brother select the safest place, that the ears of our enemies may not hear what we say," said the white man.

"A brave waits by the river-side to take us in his canoe whither we desire to go. Let us seek the solitude and well-guarded shores of the island in the river below. There can we talk in safety, for no enemy's ear can cross the water."

"It is well, great chief," answered the white plotter.

Disappointment clouded the face of the youth in the log as he heard the four emissaries of evil moving away. But his quick brain soon suggested a new course of action, and, creeping from the log, he rose to his feet and glided away through the darkness, going in the direction of the river, but keeping wide of the four enemies.

He reached the bank much in advance of them. Then he stole softly down the river until he came in sight of the Indian and canoe spoken of by Little Crow.

The warrior sat in the boat with his blanket drawn over his head. A rifle lay on the thwart at his side.

The prow of the canoe lay partly upon the beach.

The pale moonbeams, struggling downward through the darkness and mist, revealed all to the eyes of the young spy, as he crouched in the shadows near.

The keen ear of the savage boatman was on the alert. It detected a slight sound in the shrubbery. He started from his seat and fixed his eyes on the bushes before him. Then followed a "whirr;" a dull, sudden blow; a groan; the rush of feet; a plash in the water; the dip of a paddle, and the prow of a boat cleaving the waters.

The moon hid her face behind a cloud as if with shame; while the river flowed on as merrily as though its waters had not been stained with human blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONE ISLAND CONFERENCE.

SLOWLY toward the river Little Crow and his three companions made their way.

Finally they reached the river-bank a few rods above the canoe.

The moon uncovered her face and looked to earth once more.

Out upon the river Little Crow saw his boatman seated in the canoe, toying with the paddle. His head and shoulders were covered with his red and blue blanket.

The chief called to him. He headed the canoe ashore. As the prow touched upon the beach Little Crow courteously bade his white friend enter it.

The white man stepped into the craft, advanced and seated himself.

The boat was a long, slender affair, made of a log.

The paddler occupied the stern; the white man a seat next. Little Crow third, and Inkpaduta the prow.

"Let Serleque head for the Island below," said Little Crow, in a low tone.

Without a word the paddle dipped, the boat backed out from the shore, swung its long prow around, and then under the skillful management of Serleque, glided away down the stream.

Silence sealed the lips of the party.

Swiftly onward through the waves glided the craft. In a few minutes more the island was reached. Inkpaduta, followed by Little Priest, Little Crow and the white man, landed. The boatman swung his boat alongside the little sand-bar, laid down his paddle and drew his blanket closer around his head.

The island was not over a rod in width by two in length. It was a barren sand-bar, yet well guarded by the waves on either side.

Little Crow spread his blanket upon the ground and invited the white man to be seated upon it. Then the chief sat down opposite him, while the other two chiefs sat down, one upon the right and one upon the left.

"Let our white brother speak, for we are now safe," said Little Crow.

The white man at once opened the conference; he represented himself as agent of the Southern Confederacy, then waging war against the Union. He claimed that he had been sent North to effect terms of compromise with the Sioux under Little Crow, and enlist their aid in battling their enemies, promising them a vast tract of territory in case victory crowned their arms. The chiefs listened closely to the propositions of the Southern agent, and after the latter had concluded, Little Crow arose and delivered a warm and eloquent speech. He set forth the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the Government, and expressed a belief that their grievances would justify them in taking up arms. He did not come to a final decision, however, until Inkpaduta and Little Priest had expressed themselves on the subject. When they had, and he found that they favored the agent's views, the great Sioux chief at once entered into an article of agreement with the agent to assist them in their battle against the Union. Even the very day and hour upon which the Indian massacre, so prominent on the pages of history, was to begin, were agreed upon by the chiefs and the agent before the conference ended. Altogether, an hour was consumed by these four arch-plotters, and finally they rose to depart. As they turned toward the boat, a cry of surprise burst from their lips. The boat had left the island and was half-way across to the shore.

Little Crow called to his boatman, but the latter made no reply. He pushed on and soon entered the border of shadows along the shore.

Then he permitted the mantle that enveloped his head and shoulders to fall to his feet, while a low, silent peal of laughter escaped his lips.

The boatman was Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Spy, not the Indian, as Little Crow believed.

From his covert in the woods had Seth hurled a stone and stricken the Indian boatman down. Then he tossed the body overboard, enveloped himself in the savage's blanket, turned the boat away from the scene of the tragedy and paddled along the shore up-stream until hailed by the chief coming down. And in this manner, the young spy possessed himself of the secret plot so soon to deluge the land in blood.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATH TUSSELE.

SURE SHOT SETH turned and glanced back toward the island. He could see the four forms upon it, and hear the chief calling to Serleque, his boatman. Taking up his rifle from its concealment under the seat, he examined its priming, and was about to try a shot at one of the plotters when a sound in the water arrested his attention.

He gazed downward and to his horror beheld a human face peering up at him from the side of the boat. It was an Indian's face—the face of Serleque, the boatman! He had recovered from the blow he had received at the hands of the young spy, and was there to seek revenge.

Seth saw, at a glance, that the savage had an advantage to begin with, and the first thing the youth did was to place his finger to his lips and utter a shrill, piercing whistle that fairly started the savage as its intonations quivered through the air.

Instantly, almost, it was answered in a similar manner from back among the hills, and then the savage knew that the young pale-face had friends near. But, not to be thwarted in his plans of vengeance, he rocked the canoe violently and pitched Seth out into the water. Then the two grappled in a deadly struggle—the red-skin and the white—the man and the boy.

The red-skin had no weapons save those that Nature gave him. Seth having deprived him of his knife and hatchet at the time of throwing him overboard. And his young adversary was no better provided, owing to the suddenness in which the conflict

had been brought about; consequently the fight was confined to skill, strength and endurance.

Unfortunately for the youth the course of the action gravitated toward the center of the river, which fact gave the enemy another advantage in consequence of his height and the depth of the water. But brave, desperate and determined, the lad struggled manfully, heroically, giving the savage all he wanted to do. Their flying arms and feet beat and churned the water to a foam around them, as in rapid evolutions they whirled and spun to and fro in every direction. At times they would sink from view, the water boiling and surging over them, then pop up perhaps a rod from where they sunk, puffing and blowing with sheer exhaustion. Now and then they would cease their struggle for a moment to rest; but never relinquishing the hold upon each other.

During one of those lulls in the conflict, half a dozen shadowy figures glided from the woods, and pausing on the shore glanced up and down the stream. Then a voice called:

"Seth? Seth? where are you?"

"Here in a—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in the savage's yell and the renewal of the conflict.

"Boys," cried one of the party upon the shore, "Sure Shot is in peril."

"Yes! Yes!" responded the others.

"Beaver, Beaver!" exclaimed the first speaker, "that is your element—"

The lad addressed as Beaver uttered a peculiar cry of the fur-bearing animal of that name; then, divesting himself of his outer clothing, plunged into the water and struck out toward the struggling foes.

By this time Seth and the Indian had drifted out into the middle of the river, where the current was swift and strong.

Beaver swam rapidly and with as much ease apparently as though the water was his home. When within a few rods of Seth and his antagonist they rose to the surface from a long submersion, and to encourage his friend, he shouted:

"Brace up, Sure Shot; brace up, for I'm coming," and he ended with the sharp, piercing cry of the animal after which he had been named.

For a few moments they struggled in the swiftest part of the current; then spun rapidly across to the opposite shore, and disappeared among the hanging network of roots, laid bare by the wash of the waves. The Beaver knew they were out of the water by the sounds; but they were in blinding darkness. However, he was about to follow to the scene of conflict when he saw a dozen savage forms appear on the bank just over the combatants and he was compelled to change his mind. He remained perfectly still on the waves and watched. They walked to the edge of the bank and looked over, but not seeing the foes, one of them dropped himself down into the river and crept under the bank to his friend's assistance.

The next moment a cry of agony issued from under the bank; then all became still.

The battle was ended, but who had been the victor?

The Beaver, slowly drifting down the river unseen by the savages, held his breath in suspense.

The next moment a figure crept out from under the bank, and climbing up into the moonlight, brandished aloft a human scalp, at the same time uttering a fierce, triumphant war-whoop.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRONG SCALP AND THE BOY BRIGADE.

THE Beaver drifted slowly down the river beyond danger, then sought the shore and his companions.

"Boys," he said, sad and heavy-hearted, "our gallant young leader is gone. The accursed savages were too much for him. Poor Seth! his scalp is the first of the long-threatened troubles."

A groan of the deepest anguish was wrung from the lips of each of the little band of youths—followers of Sure Shot Seth.

They held a short consultation in the edge of the woods among the shadows; and as the Indians had left the opposite shore, they concluded to embark in the canoe, that lay on the beach before them, in quest of Seth's body. But at this very moment the Indians came back, terribly excited, on the opposite shore, and at the same instant the boys discovered that a large party was also approaching on their side from above.

"Scatter, boys!" exclaimed one of the party, and the next moment all disappeared like a shadow before a burst of sunshine.

A savage yell rung through the forest—a yell, the like of which had not been heard for a long time in that region.

It was a blood-curdling war-whoop!

Away through the forest like hounds glided the shadowy forms of the savages, their treacherous hearts thirsting for human blood.

Here and there, every boy taking care of himself, glided the followers of Sure Shot Seth. With the silence of panthers they crept among the bushes, dodged around the trees and rocks, and stole onward through the woods and darkness.

Suddenly the sharp bark of a fox broke upon the night. One of the fleeing youths started as though a bullet had whistled past his ears. He stopped, bent his head and listened. Again the barking of the fox broke upon his ears. A smile of happy surprise burst over his face, and clear and distinct he sent forth an exact imitation of the sound he had heard. Then he glided away in the direction whence the barking had emanated. He moved briskly, yet with silence, keeping the one course in a "bee-line." He had gone nearly a hundred yards when a low voice hailed him:

"Hullo; is it you, Reynard?"

"Great heavens!" was the excited answer; "do my ears deceive me? Or do I hear the voice of Sure Shot Seth?"

"I am here, Reynard," was the response, and Sure Shot Seth stepped from a cluster of bushes and confronted his friend.

"Well, by the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Reynard, "there's a big mistake somewhere. Why, Seth, we mourned you as dead. That savage flourished a scalp aloft when he came from under the bark and uttered a triumphant scalp-cry."

"I know he did, the deluded fool; but the fact is, he took the scalp of a friend. He succeeded in getting his knife out just as I discovered that a second red-skin had appeared on the scene, and by a sudden movement I brought my enemy into such a position as to receive the knife of his friend in his heart. The savage knew not but that it was me, and tearing off his scalp, rushed out and climbed up the bank in great glee with a comrade's scalp, leaving me to make my way out at leisure. But are the other boys about, Reynard?"

"Yes; they are scattered through the woods, and not a few red-skins are after them. But, Seth, what did you discover to-night? Were the chiefs in council with that Southern agent?"

"Yes; and I discovered all I wanted to—that the red-skins have dug up the hatchet, and that the Yellow Medicine Agency, Fort Ridgely, New Ulm and the Lower Agency are all marked for destruction. The good settlers of these places must be put upon their guard at once; and so I will call the Brigade, and then turn our faces in that direction. Whippowill! whippowill!"

The last two words whistled from his lips in an exact imitation of that night-bird, whose peculiar song seems very plain to articulate the syllables which compose its own name. A moment later a similar answer was given; and still a few moments later, a figure emerged from the shadows into the little opening where Seth and Reynard stood in waiting.

"Ay, friend Whippowill!" cried Seth, extending his hand.

"Blessed Virgin!" exclaimed the youth in the Celtic brogue, "and, bedad, and I'm glad to mate ye, Seth, me b'y."

The three soon relapsed into silence; then Seth uttered a cry like that of a beaver, and was soon answered in a similar manner. A few moments afterward, the lad, Beaver, who had swam to Seth's assistance, joined the group, beside himself with joy.

Then Seth sent forth the hoot of an owl, the howl of a wolf, and the scream of a panther; and, in answer to the calls, three more youths made their appearance, and joined the group amid the wildest rejoicing.

And then and there in that wildwood opening were assembled seven youths, differing as widely from each other as nature could make them; yet joined together as if bound by all the ties of a sacred brotherhood. By profession they were trappers, and were known as the Boy Brigade. Each represented some different nationality, or peculiarity. There was an Irish, German, African, and Indian youth in the party, the others being Americans. All had been reared in the woods, and amid the wild dangers of the border. As a party, they were as one; but individuality made them as different in tastes and notions as seven persons could well be. While one liked to trap the beaver, another would rather hunt the fox, or the wolf, or the deer. And it was the same way with the sounds they heard. While one loved to hear the plaintive song of the whippowill, another found more music in the jarring hoot of an owl. Thus, by their different pursuits and respective eccentricities, had each come into possession of a sobriquet by which he was known to the band.

Seth March, the leader of this Boy Brigade, was called Sure Shot, in consequence of his unerring marksmanship.

Justin Gray was the Beaver. He made that animal a special object in hunting and trapping.

Teddy O'Roop loved the song of the whippowill, and the name of that bird was given him.

Balwin Judd became Reynard, the fox, after having caught a number of those animals.

Tim Tricks, the African youth, being cook, became Black Pan.

The Owl was the big-eyed, round-faced German lad.

Hooseah, the Indian boy, answered to the name of Le Subtle Wolf. The name was not given him because he had any particular love for that animal, but because his movements were as sly and cunning in "bagging" game as the wolf's in taking prey. The glossy skin of a wolf was part of his dress.

These names and their emblems were but boyish whims; yet all had become familiar in the local history of Minnesota; for the Boy Brigade was an organization of its kind unsurpassed even by men of age and experience. The oldest of the party was nineteen, the youngest sixteen. Sure Shot Seth, their leader, was eighteen, and yet possessed all the developments of perfect manhood. As a trapper, he had no peer; and it was with no feeling of envy or reluctance that he was chosen leader of the little band of boys, who, early thrown upon their own resources, chose the exciting, adventurous calling of the trapper. For two years their business had been one of undisputed profit and pleasure, but now the threatened Indian war would put an end to it; but they accepted all in the spirit of true heroism, and decided to stand and fight by those who had stood by them in days gone by.

Their mission for the night having ended, the Boy Brigade bent their steps southward.

Rapidly, and yet silently, they made their way through the trackless forest. Mile after mile was traversed, until finally they drew up in front of a long, low, double cabin built of logs, and standing in the heart of a deep, dense wilderness of mighty

piners. It was the home of the Brigade; and here, inside and out, was evidence of no little culture and refinement.

The odor that pervaded the atmosphere was not that of the wildwoods alone; but the mingled fragrance of wild flowers filled the air. The cabin was overrun with honeysuckles and morning-glories, and a dozen other flowers, all carefully cultivated by the boys, contributed their sweetness to that delicate sense of refinement so seldom found among the rude children of the border. The cabin door was approached through a long, shady arbor of wild cucumber vines, where the hot days of summer were passed on the grass-plot beneath the sylvan shade.

The little band filed down this avenue of green, fragrant verdure, and paused before the door. Seth raised the latch, pushed open the door, and entered. His companions followed him across the threshold. All was gloom in the cabin, but, halting in the center of the room, Seth sniffed the air, then exclaimed:

"Boys, what do you smell?"

"Tobacco, by the Howly Virgin!" exclaimed the Whippowil, and all repeated his answer.

"That's it," answered Seth, "and as none of us ever use the weed, some stranger has been here smoking."

A candle was at once lit, and as its light dispelled the gloom, the boys glanced hastily about them to see if the intruder had taken liberties with their cabin. But all was as they had left it.

The cabin was divided into two rooms by a partition of logs, and the one the boys first entered was used as a kind of sitting-room. The walls were hung with fancifully-wrought robes and furs, and adorned with the stuffed skins of beautiful birds and small animals. Over each door were the branching antlers of an elk, among which were coiled monstrous spotted serpents. On a table in one corner were a number of time-worn books—books of the very best kind for the young mind; and, in addition to this source of mental culture and pastime, a violin and harp hung upon the wall.

The young trappers set aside their weapons, and seating themselves, entered into conversation. The conference, to which Seth had been an auditor, formed the general topic of discussion. That an Indian war was inevitable, they had not a doubt; and as it would be impossible for them to continue trapping, they decided to gather in their traps, dispose of their stock on hand, and vacate the Hermit Hut, as the place was called, and take up arms against the savage. At least this was the decision of most of the party, a few evading a direct answer as to their future course. Seth noticed this hesitation with no little surprise, but said nothing. He resolved to let the matter rest until morning, then insist for a direct answer from all.

"Boys," said Seth after they had discussed the different topics of interest, "this is probably the last night we will be here, and so let us have some music, and a final merry-making."

All acquiesced, and the Indian lad, Le Subtile Wolf, having been placed on guard outside, Tim Tricks took down the fiddle and Sure Shot Seth the harp.

Tim Tricks and Seth were both fine musicians, and, in accordance with the Whippowil's request, struck up the "Grand Russian March," much to the delight of their auditors.

The music swelled out in enchanting melody, and with its varying notes, the blood of the youths glided through their veins in symphony with the soul-stirring strains.

But in the midst of all, while every mind was diverted from the cares of the outside world, and absorbed in the sweet melody of music, a dark body suddenly dropped from above in the middle of the floor with a dull, heavy thud, and something bright upon it glinted in the light.

The music ceased, and the boys started to their feet with an involuntary exclamation of horror.

In the room before them stood a powerful savage,

his head shaven, his face in war-paint, and wreathed in a sinister smile of diabolical triumph.

There was no loft in the room, and, glancing upward, the boys saw an opening had been made in the roof during the musical entertainment, and, before they had time to act, a second savage swung himself down into the room and confronted the young hunters. He was immediately followed by a third, a fourth, and so on, until six powerful warriors stood in the middle of the house, facing the Boy Brigade with their hands upon their weapons, a devilish smile of triumph upon their faces, and a murderous intent in their hearts.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE HUT.

For fully a minute a speechless silence reigned in the Hermit Hut, the savages eying the boys, and the latter exchanging glances with one and another. Had the red-skins entered the door as had been their wont in days past, the boys would not have mistrusted them of murderous designs. But their war-paint, and every feature of the face, and the black ferret-eyes, bespoke the evil, murderous purpose in their hearts.

The Brigade had deposited all their rifles in one corner, and edging around by degrees, the savages managed to get themselves between the boys and the guns, believing that they were in possession of no other weapons. But in this the red-skins were mistaken. Each of the boys was possessed of a small revolver, and which, at close quarters, would be the most desirable weapon.

The savages were armed with the deadliest weapons—the tomahawk and scalping knife. But none of them were drawn, and a movement of a hand to the belt would be a signal for the boys to precipitate the conflict.

For half a minute a lull—such as precedes the violence of the storm—fell upon the two lines of enemies, though each form seemed to tremble with the emotions that were pent up within it.

Seth had, adroitly, yet without any apparent motion whatever, transferred his hands to his breeches pockets, in the right of which he always carried his revolvers, it being more convenient.

His friends saw this movement, and comprehended its meaning at once, though it never entered the Indian's brains that his movement was other than a manifestation of peace; and as the youth's companions assumed positions and attitudes that brought their right hands in juxtaposition with their revolvers, a savage spoke:

"We will not kill the boy trappers if they will go quietly as prisoners to the village of Little Crow."

"We haven't the least assurance of this," answered Seth, "for we have found the Sioux to be treacherous as the moccasin-snake."

"For these words shall the pale-face boy die," replied the chief, unloosing his tomahawk. But, before he could release the weapon, the hand of the young trapper-boy was withdrawn from his pocket and extended toward the savage's face. There was a flash and report simultaneously, and the warrior, with a deep groan of horrible pain, started back; his face contorted with agony and his muscles quivering, he fell like an ox upon the floor. A round hole in his forehead bearing the powder-marks around its edges told where the unerring bullet had struck.

This was a signal for a general attack, and the clash of five other revolvers rung out sharp and stunning on the night. Every savage went down before the deadly weapons, and victory seemed but the labor of an instant for our friends; but in the moment of their bloodless triumph, a fiendish yell outside the door burst from the lips of a score of red-skins; the door was flung open, and the yelling demons rushed into the cabin like a tornado.

Turning on his heel, as the door burst from its hinges, Sure Shot Seth fired at the candle, snuffing out the light as completely as though done by a gust of wind!

Then the revolvers of the boy trappers were turned toward the door, and a constant stream of fire flashed in the faces of the savages. The groans of the dying wretches were mingled with the crack of the revolvers, the sodden fall of heavy bodies, and the tumbling of the excited savages over their fallen comrades as they rushed into the darkened room.

The boy trappers gradually edged around toward the door leading into the opposite room; and as each one emptied the last chamber of his revolver, he passed out into the adjacent apartment. Not a word escaped the lips of the young friends, and one by one their revolvers became silenced; but whether it was by death, or by being emptied, each could tell nothing regarding his comrade.

A light was obtained by the savages, and then it was that they beheld the terrible loss they had already sustained. Maddened by the sight of their dead braves, they sought the foe in the adjoining room, but the scene of battle had been transferred to the open air. In front of the cabin the boy trappers met a number of savages as they passed out, and here another conflict ensued.

"Boys," cried Sure Shot Seth, "make for the woods!—every fellow for himself!"

A moment later there seemed to be a perceptible pause in the struggle as the sound of the conflict spread out in all directions, and yells of savage vengeance rung through the forest. By these sounds Sure Shot Seth knew that his men had obeyed orders, and that all the survivors were seeking safety by flight to the woods. But how many had fallen? This was the question that now rose in the young trapper's mind as he pursued his lonely way through the dark and gloomy wilderness. When assured that he had eluded his pursuers, Seth stopped and sat down upon a log.

All noise of the late conflict was left behind, and unbroken silence pervaded the night.

Sure Shot Seth grew easier now. He knew by the sounds that came to his ear that no danger was lurking near. The acute ear of the experienced woodman can read the voices of nature as though spoken in an intelligible dialect. Through force of habit he becomes accustomed to his surroundings, and intuitively learns by instinct the language of both animate and inanimate nature, for inanimate nature has a language, and one that never deceives.

It was the assurance that no danger lurked near that gave Seth relief; and when satisfied that he could do so with impunity, he gave utterance to the sharp bark of the fox.

Instantly he was answered in a similar manner from among the hills.

"Reynard, the Fox, lives," the young leader said; then he uttered the cry of the beaver, and was answered.

Then changing his position, he gave utterance to the scream of a panther, the howl of a wolf, the hoot of an owl, and the cry of a whippowil. All answered but one.

"As I live!" soliloquized Seth, "the boys all answered but the Indian, Le Subtile Wolf. Can it be that he has been slain?"

Hooseah was a brave and fearless youth, with but little of the savage in his nature. He was a Chippewa by birth, and had spent all his days among the whites, coming from northern Michigan when quite a lad; so there was no danger to apprehend of his want of fidelity to the whites. Seth was satisfied that he had either been killed or else had not heard his call. He did not repeat it through fear of confusion, or of increasing their danger.

Moving further back into the woods, Seth finally sat down in a dense thicket of shrubbery, leaned against a tree and went to sleep. This was not a very commendable act for a borderman, but Seth knew that no danger could befall him there in such a lonely and desolate spot. Moreover, he was almost exhausted with his night's adventure, and nothing but sleep could restore the much-needed strength.

It was just growing light when he awoke. He could see the dusky outline of the tree-trunks around him, and leaning against one of these, motionless as the tree itself, he saw the outlines of an Indian warrior!

CHAPTER VI.

A QUEER OLD CUSTOMER.

SETH started to his feet, half-bewildered and half-terrified at sight of the savage standing over him.

To his surprise, however, he saw that the Indian did not move, and a second thought and second glance removed a terrible weight from the youth's mind; for he now recognized the red-skin as his friend, Hooseah, or Le Subtile Wolf. The Indian lad was standing there asleep. It was the way a Chippewa slept on the war-path.

Seth glanced around him, and on the opposite side of the same tree, against which he had reclined, he saw the form of Justin Gray, the Beaver, curled up in a sound slumber; and under another tree not far away, the form of Black Pan, the African, stretched at full length along the ground.

Seth gave utterance to the shrill cry of a bird, then in a clear voice called out:

"Le Subtile Wolf?"

"Ugh! me here," muttered the lad, starting from his slumber.

"Justin Gray?"

"Here."

"Tim Tricks?"

"Here I is, ole boss."

"Baldwin Judd?"

"Here," came from in the bushes.

"Teddy O'Roop?"

"Here, bedad."

"Mort Schultz?"

"I here ish."

And as each one answered to his name, he emerged from among the shadows and stood before his young leader, Sure Shot Seth.

"Thank God, we are all permitted to meet again," said Seth.

This was the point designated as a rendezvous before leaving the cabin when the savages were pouring in upon them; hence the remarkable manner under which they all met.

The marks of a restless night, and of excitement, were upon each face; yet no look, word or movement betrayed the least sign of fear. While the red dawn of the rosy morn was bursting into light around them, a shrill, sharp voice suddenly cried out:

"Here!"

The boys started as though a torpedo had exploded in their midst. They glanced around them, then at another, a look of wild astonishment upon each face.

"Here!" again shouted the unknown voice, and the sound was followed by an outburst of rollicking laughter.

It came from overhead, and raising their eyes, the young bordermen saw that which forced an involuntary exclamation from their lips. Attached to a limb of the wide-spreading oak was a sort of a rude hammock made of a blanket, and over the end of this the quaint, comical face of an old man looked down upon them.

This old stranger was a man of nearly threescore years; yet the bright luster of his mischievous gray eyes, and the smile upon his thin, bearded face, told of a youthful, buoyant spirit.

"I'm in at roll-call, too," he exclaimed, in a whimsical tone; "sound the reveille, beat the drum, and rat-tat-too, for day has broke, the birds are astir, and the devil's to pay."

"Will, now!" exclaimed Teddy O'Roop, "and what fur a baste have we got there now?"

"Hello, boggy-tongue," answered the man, with a comical smile, as he turned over on his stomach in his hammock and gazed complacently down upon the Brigade, while he kicked up his heels like a

listless school-boy lying in the shade. "I should think you could see that I'm not a 'possum up here; nor that I'm not an oriole in a hangin' nest, but a full-fledged rooster of the *genus* man who roosts high and dry."

"We observe that you *are* rather elevated in your ideas of repose," said Seth.

"Elevated, did yer say?" replied the man; "Jews and Gentiles; that's no name for it. It's perfectly delicious up here. Ye see, I've slept around on the yearth with bugs, and snakes, and turtles, and bears, and wolves, and Indians, and snails, and alligators, crawling over and sniffin' round me long enough; and so I come to the conclusion that I'd hang myself up in a tree after'ds; and I find it's delicious. I'm old Joyful Jim Tucker, a brother of the veritable Daniel who had a Darby lamb; and so I'll jist come from my chamber in the air, and quiz you chaps a bit."

The man stepped out upon a limb, unfastened his hammock, took a rifle and its accouterments from among the thick foliage above his head, and then descended to the ground. He shook hands with the boys all around, then said:

"S'pose you chaps are on the war-path?"

"Can't say that we are, exactly, though we had quite a fight last night with savages at our cabin, and were routed, though we lost no men."

"You don't mean to say that you compose Sure Shot Seth's Boy Brigade, that's been ranchin' at the Hermit Hut?" exclaimed Joyful Jim.

"We're the Boy Brigade," answered Seth.

"Judas and Benedict Arnold! Why, boys, I was just on my way to your ranch."

"From where?"

"Minnesota in ginerall; you see I've been doin' a little tradin' up here 'mong the Ingins for the past few years. I've been tradin' 'em beads, pocket-knives and 'doctored water,' for peltries; but as they've dug up the hatchet, I concluded to make myself seldom in their midst, and so pointed nose for the Hermit Hut. And so they've routed you hoss and foot?"

"They came upon us ten to one."

"They did? Wal, then, thar's no denyin' blood and war are upon us; and so I propose to have a hand in it. If the critters hadn't confiscated all my stock, I'd been easier onto 'em; but now I propose to let 'em know that I wer'n't eddicated in the city. I'll jist sail right into 'em, boot and toe-nail."

"Yow-oo-o!" suddenly rung in a low quavering echo through the woods.

Every boy started as if shot.

"It is Le Subtile Wolf," said Seth, who, for the first time, noticed the absence of the Indian from their midst.

The Indian lad came bounding into the midst of his friends, brandishing above his head a Sioux scalp, and followed by a strange youth.

"Great shockin'!" exclaimed Old Jim. "here's this bloody Turk with a red-skin scalp. Who says you can civilize or tame an Ingin?"

"It's an Indian's nature to scalp, and I presume you can't preach it out of him," said Sure Shot Seth; "but who have you here, Hooseah?" and he turned to the white lad accompanying him.

"Ed Thornly," answered the youth himself.

"Ed Thornly? Haven't I seen you at Yellow Medicine?"

"Yes; I reside there; you are Sure Shot Seth, I believe?"

"The same," answered our hero.

"Then my mission is at an end, though I thought for awhile the Indians had ended it this morning for me when they captured me. Thanks to your red friend here I was liberated."

"Then you were on your way to the Hermit Hut?"

"Yes—totally ignorant of the fact that the Indians had begun their depredations. But I am here to see you, Seth, on a little matter concerning us boys at the Agency. To-morrow we are to have a shoot-

ing-match there for boys. A fine rifle is to be the prize. There is some rivalry between Tom Grayson and Ivan Le Clercq, the two best shots at the place; but on the part of the latter it is not a friendly rivalry. He has already resorted to foul means to defeat Tom, whom the majority of the people like. By the mean advantage already gained, it is feared that Le Clercq will win, so we boys held a meeting and concluded to send for you, and have you take some of the conceit and self-arrogance out of that fellow. I have a request here, signed by nearly all the boys in the Agency, for you to come down and scoop Le Clercq out."

Seth's eyes brightened as Ed presented him the paper, upon which were a number of names. It was a concession to his superior marksmanship, and he felt proud of the honor thus conferred upon him by the Agency boys. He could, under no circumstances, decline, and expressed his surprise at the honor bestowed upon him, and promised Ed that he would be on hand at the shooting-match.

"I'll teach your friend Ivan a lesson he has never learned in handling firearms," he said, "and, as I am without a rifle now, it will be a kind of a God-send to get a new one. Yes, you can tell Tom Grayson that I'll be there."

The whole band now moved southward, accompanied by Ed Thornly and Joyful Jim, the reputed Indian trader.

That night they encamped ten miles from the Agency. Ed Thornly went on home alone, but under cover of the darkness.

Bright and early the next morning Sure Shot Seth left the Brigade and set out for Yellow Medicine to fulfill his engagement at the shooting-match.

Shortly after his departure the Brigade struck a fresh Indian trail leading toward the southwest, and feeling fully satisfied that the enemy were upon the war-path, they set off in pursuit of the foe—upon their first war trail.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY CONSPIRATORS.

YELLOW MEDICINE AGENCY was the scene of no little excitement, for there was to be a shooting-match there that day; and a big time was anticipated, for such amusement of the border settlers usually drew a large number of persons. And, what made this all the more interesting, it was to be a match for boys. A fine rifle of exquisite workmanship and elegant finish, and purchased by Squire Podson. The shooting was all to be done with the new rifle, at the distance of one hundred and fifty paces.

The boys at the Agency—and there were quite a number of them—were wild over the coming match, and were out practicing daily in the woods at target-shooting. There were some fine shots in the party, and the contest was likely to be a close one. There was but little difference in the shooting of Tom Grayson, Josh Parson and Ivan Le Clercq. If there was any difference, it was in favor of the latter. Le Clercq was a French half-breed. He was a fine-looking lad, with dark eyes pleasant face, and a form straight as an arrow. He was rather wild and wayward, and some thought a little treacherous and insincere in character.

There were those in Yellow Medicine that objected to their boys associating with Ivan; and there were others who exercised but little control over their boys, and did not presume to select their companions. The result was that those inclined to mischief became the followers of the wild, harum-scarum Ivan Le Clercq; while the quiet, disposed were the friends of Tom Grayson.

The latter was a kind, brave and whole-souled lad of seventeen, who loved the sports of the woods as well as any one living. He was kind and generous to both old and young, and possessed of all the attributes of a true and perfect man, both moral and physical.

As a boy, from a certain period, has a natural

tendency toward sin, Ivan, as a matter of course, had the largest party of followers; and as the two parties stood divided on all other questions, so they were divided on the coming shooting-match. Ivan and party practiced off by themselves, keeping the result a secret from the others; but in the mean time he sent a spy into Tom's camp, and thereby kept posted as to Tom and Josh's skill.

Ivan Le Clercq finally became so anxious to be the winner of the prize that he let his ambition stoop to the unscrupulous trick of stealing Tom's gun and hiding it away where it could not be found for several days. This roused the blood in Tom's veins, and he resolved to have Ivan defeated in the shooting-match, even at the sacrifice of the honor of winning the prize himself; and so sent an invitation to Sure Shot Seth to attend the match.

Some way or other, Le Clercq got wind of this movement, when another trouble was added to his list of fancied wrongs; and to obviate this new danger to his winning the prize, he called a council of four of his most intimate friends on the evening before the day of the contest. They met about sunset on the river-bank, and in tones of secrecy discussed the probable result of the morrow's sport.

All felt satisfied that if Sure Shot Seth came, he would win the day without any trouble.

"But we must not let him come," said Le Clercq, emphatically.

"But if he concludes to come, how are we going to help ourselves?" asked one of his companions.

"That's the question before the house," said Ivan, "and I've a way in my mind as to how to keep Seth away."

"How?" asked a companion.

"Guess."

"Shoot him?"

"Not that rough."

"Stick him into the river with a stone round his neck?"

"No; watch the road he'll come to-morrow, and catch him and tie him up till after the shooting is over," said Ivan.

"That'll fix him," exclaimed a companion, approvingly.

"Let's do it," echoed the others.

"Nuff said," added Ivan; "if you fellers 'll say you'll help me, I'll get ropes ready to-night and to-morrow we'll come down here and watch him where he crosses the river, and snail him up. What do you say?"

"All right! we'll help!" cried the young scamps.

And the matter being thus settled, the conspirators adjourned, and retraced their footsteps toward home. But scarcely were they out of sight ere two maidens, of about sixteen summers, stepped from a thicket near, their pretty young faces aglow with pleasure, and their bright eyes sparkling with inward delight.

"We'll see about that tying up Sure Shot Seth, won't we, Maggie?" said one.

"We will that, Emma; and won't it be jolly to beat such bad boys?"

And the two maidens laughed merrily over the idea, as hand-in-hand they sauntered leisurely homeward.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO WON THE RIFLE.

THE day of the shooting-match dawned bright and clear. The air was soft and light, and not a breeze was stirring. Nature seemed to have prepared the day especially for Squire Podson's entertainment; and by noon all the people in the Agency and vicinity had gathered in the "Openings," in the river bottom to witness the contest. Not all either, for Ivan Le Clercq and four of his boon companions were not there. Neither was Sure Shot Seth, but he was momentarily expected.

At one o'clock the shooting commenced, with indifferent result. Tom Grayson was not a little surprised at the absence of Ivan Le Clercq, and

bitterly disappointed not to find one other face among the spectators. That was the face of Emma Milbank. All the rest of the women and girls of his acquaintance were there except she and Maggie Harris.

Now, Tom loved Emma very dearly; hence his disappointment at not seeing her there. For her to see him win the prize would have been worth more to him than a dozen prizes; for her to have cheered his success with one smile, would have been worth still more than all; for it would have assured him of her regards—that his love was in a measure reciprocated.

Meanwhile, we will look after Ivan Le Clercq and his party. Early that morning the young rascals put out for the river, and, having reached its banks, scattered out along the stream about a hundred yards apart to watch for the coming of Sure Shot Seth. After hours of impatient waiting and watching, a boat rounded the bend up the river with a single occupant—Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman.

The boy that made this discovery hastily communicated the fact to those below, and in a few minutes all were together. They knew about where Seth would land, and as he would have to pass through a strip of dense woods after leaving the river to reach the Agency, Ivan and his party ran on ahead, and having masked their faces, awaited the approach of Seth.

The unsuspecting youth soon came tripping lightly along, whistling as merrily as only a boy can. He was dressed in a neat-fitting suit of buckskin, with a fringe of the same material up the seams of the leggings and around the waist and shoulders. He carried no rifle, nor weapon of any sort that were visible, which fact removed some fears from the breasts of those lying in ambush for him.

Suddenly the rush of feet arrested his attention. He stopped and looked around him. Five persons, with masks upon their faces, rushed out of the shadows and sized him. He struggled desperately, heroically, and for awhile held his adversaries a lively fight. But superior numbers finally triumphed. He was overpowered, borne to the ground, and bound and gagged. Then he was carried into a thicket and tied to a tree where no human eye could detect his presence ten feet away.

This done, the young ruffians hurried away in the direction of the "Openings," whence they could already hear the clear ringing report of the rifles at the shooting-tournament coming.

When a few rods from the thicket they threw aside their disguises; Ivan Le Clercq's face looked red and excited; it showed the unmistakable signs of a guilty conscience. But calming his emotions the best way he could, he entered the crowd gathered in the Openings.

"Ho, Ivan, my boy," exclaimed Squire Podson, "You are late, young man; whar the deuce 've you been?"

"We've been out on a deer-hunt. Buck Jones said thar were three deer that come down to the old ferry every morning to drink, and we thought we'd secure one or two."

And what a falsehood the boy told!

"Well," continued the squire, "you were just in time, for the last boy has shot, and Tom Grayson is champion so far. We have been looking for Sure Shot Seth, down from the Hermit Hut, all morning, and he may come yet. But now, Ivan, do you want to try your hand?"

"To be sure I do; that's what I come for," was the impertinent reply.

The squire loaded his gun and handed it to Ivan. The youth turned facing the target, raised the gun—shooting off-hand—and fired. In a minute the news came up from the target that he made a winning shot.

The crowd cheered the boy lustily.

Each contestant was allowed three shots, the best in three winning.

Tom Grayson had hit the target twice out of three possible shots.

Again the gun was loaded, and again Ivan Le Clercq fired. In a moment the news came up that he had made another winning shot.

Loud and prolonged rung the shouts from the spectators; while with a look of triumph, Ivan's eyes sought those of Tom.

Again was the gun loaded and handed to the youth. With more than usual ceremony, intended to command admiration, Ivan raised the rifle, and glancing along the barrel, fired.

A deep and deadly silence fell upon the crowd, and an eager and expectant look mounted every face, in the anxiety to know the result of Ivan's last shot.

Slowly upon the air came the response:

"Missed entirely."

Then the lull broke into a storm of shouts of derision and exclamations of regret. A general hubbub of voices arose, and the crowd became clamorous to know who had won the prize.

"Nobody, in course," answered Squire Podson; "Tom and Ivan tied, and so the two 'll have to shoot it over."

This satisfied the friends of the two boys and the shooting was resumed; but it resulted as before—in a tie.

"Shoot it over ag'in," said the squire; but at this juncture a new-comer pushed his way into the crowd and demanded a trial in the contest.

No one had noticed this young stranger until he was in the midst of the party; and all were not a little surprised, at his presence.

He was rather an odd specimen of the genus boy. There was no telling how old he was; but that he was not beyond the limitations of the rules of the contest, was evident to all. His face was covered with a complication of rings and dirty streaks made of the different pigments used by the Indians. Around each eye was painted three rings—the inner one being black, the second blue, and the third red—which gave him the wild, staring expression of a comic old owl. His nose was painted black; his cheeks were touched with blue; and his mouth encircled by a ring of dirty red. His hair was cropped close and the bristling stubs had also received a coloring of red, black and blue, in spots. He was dressed in a suit as odd and queer as himself; and, altogether, he was the most comic and clownish-looking person it had been the fortune of our friends to meet.

"Mortal inspiration!" exclaimed the old squire, at sight of the lad, "who in all the mystery be you?"

"I are the young ring-eyed eagle, jist soared down from the Rocky Mountains to try a shot at this business," exclaimed the youth, in a kind of a squeaky tone, keeping one corner of his mouth depressed; "I are the little eagle whose dad lords it over the United States and screams along the sky. Show me the chicken that says he can beat me shootin', and I'll flop a wing into his anatomy."

"Hold on here, youngster," said Podson, "you're crazy, ben't you?"

"Crazy! Oh-a-yi! a-yi!" he screamed, in exact imitation of the eagle, "give me a few shots at the target, and I'll show you that the ring-eyed eaglet of Sky-Puncher-Peak can warm the wax in any boy's ears this side of his fu'st birthday at shootin'. Fight, did you say? Lord, no; I'd run afore I'd fight, for I'm the young bird of Freedom—a-yi! a-yi!"

The inquisitive throng, that had crowded around the lad, filled with great excitement and curiosity, now burst into a peal of laughter at the comic antics of the rollicking young Eagle from Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"Well, now, lookey here, Eagle," said Podson, "whar you from, and what do you want here?"

"From Sky-Puncher-Peak, I tell ye, and am here to take a hand in the shootin'-match. Jist furnish me a gun, show me the thingamagig you shoot at, and I'll show you that the ring-eyed Eagle from

Sky-Puncher-Peak's not so slouchy, if he is jist git-tin' his fu'st pin-feathers."

Podson, as well as a number of others, saw that the lad, whoever he was, was playing a *role* in his disguise; and while they were wondering who he could be, and what his object was, their amusement became manifest in peals of hearty laughter. Finally the old squire said:

"Well, if you've come here to shoot, why, in course, you must have a chance. This 'ere rifle's the prize, but, mind, it'll take three shots in the center of yon target to get it."

"How many chances'll you give me—forty?"

"Just three."

"Oh, vampires and harpies!" exclaimed the youth, with a grimace that provoked a roar of laughter. "Then 'cordin' to that some chap has scored two out of three; just show him to me, please, till I see the white of his eye, and then I—"

"I'm the chap, sir," said Ivan Le Clercq, confronting the Eagle-from-Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"Thar's nothin'," said the youth, running his eye along Ivan's form with a quick, but critical look.

"That's a tie," interrupted the squire, "between him—Ivan—and that feller; so if you want to try a shot at the mark, why, do so."

"Thank you; please pass me yer fusilade and I'll try its mettle. Cl'ar the tracks, folks, for the young Eagle-from-Sky-Puncher-Peak."

The crowd parted in a lane extending down toward the target, and scarcely was the range cleared ere the boy carelessly threw the rifle to his shoulder, and the gun was discharged, as all supposed by accident.

"A plumb-center shot," was the announcement that came up from the target.

A wild, prolonged shout that fairly split the heavens burst from the lips of the crowd.

The boy whistled softly as if with surprise at his own skill. The shouts of the crowd turned to laughter as they saw the sober, comic expression of the inimitable young clown's face.

"Ready for another," said Podson, as he placed a cap on the nipple of the gun.

The boy spat upon his hands, winked at an imaginary friend, then took the rifle, and before it was scarcely leveled, fired.

A deep silence followed the report, and every eye turned toward the target.

"Another winning shot," was the announcement that the recorder sent forth, and again the crowd cheered the young "ring-eyed eagle."

The third time was the gun reloaded, and the third time did the lad awkwardly swing the weapon to his shoulder, squint first with one eye then the other along the barrel, to the amusement of the spectators, then he closed both eyes and fired.

For the next half-minute not a soul seemed to breathe, so deep and intense was the anxiety and expectancy of the party. But it was the calm that preceded the storm following the announcement:

"That shot takes the prize—the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak has won!"

CHAPTER IX.

HUNTED AND HAUNTED.

THE shouts that followed the announcement of the result of the shooting-match were deafening; and the young Ring-Eyed-Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak became the recipient of a hundred congratulations. Tom Grayson was the first to grasp the young stranger's hand, for since he had failed to win the prize, it afforded him supreme pleasure to know that Ivan Le Clercq had been defeated.

The latter stood off at one side among his little party of friends scowling with chagrin, and burning with anger at his defeat.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, in a whisper to his four companions, "if I can get old Podson to extend the time, I'll run up and release Sure Shot Seth, and let him come down and beat that young braggart. Tom Grayson is tickled half to death 'cause I got

beat, and I'd give an eye just to see him look down his nose, and that daubed-faced fool beaten."

"Here, youngster," the voice of Squire Podson suddenly broke in, as he handed the Eagle the rifle and accouterments belonging to it; "here's the prize—take it, for you have won it fair and honorably, whoever you may be. The gun is loaded, and there's not less'n fifty bullets in the pouch, and powder in the horn to shove 'em. Take it, and I hope you will make every shot count so long as you may possess it."

A faint scream of terror came from the direction of the woods some two hundred yards away, before the Eagle could respond, as he was about to do.

Every eye was at once turned in that direction, and to the horror of all, a maiden, whom all recognized as Emma Milbank, emerged from the woods at the top of her speed, closely pursued by an Indian warrior.

"Oh, my God!" burst from Squire Podson's lips, "the savages are at their hellish work already."

Brave hearts trembled, and white lips quivered. Women fell faint, and children crouched with terror at the feet of their parents. It was a terrible moment in the history of those people's lives, for all seemed paralyzed with the terrors of death. But all were started from their lethargy by another shriek.

"The savage has caught Emma!" was the terrible announcement that now pealed from a dozen lips.

True enough, the savage had overtaken her within ten rods of the edge of the timber, and lifting her in his arms was fleeing back to the woods.

"Stand aside for the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak," shouted that mysterious lad, and swinging his newly-won prize to his shoulder glanced along the barrel and fired.

A yell of agony came down from the woods; and when all saw the savage stagger and fall, a shout burst from their lips; the Eagle had made another wonderful shot, and had saved the maiden from captivity.

With the speed of a deer the young marksman dashed out of the crowd and sped away toward the fallen foe. He met the maiden he had saved on the way, and exchanging a few words with her, ran on, passed the fallen savage and plunged into the woods. A moment later a rifle-shot rung through the forest and echoed in quavering intonations along the valley of the Minnesota. Scarcely had the sound died on the air, when forth from the woods south of the Openings a hundred half-nude forms rushed, yelling like demons.

With a cry of horror the surprised settlers turned and fled toward their homes. With the women and children in front, the men covered their retreat, fighting the foe as they fell back. The savages' onward rush was checked several times; but nothing daunted, they rallied and renewed the contest fierce and deadly.

It soon became evident that the settlers could not repulse the foe, and so the retreat was turned in the direction of the stockade or fort, north of the Agency. The savages seeing their intentions, attempted to thwart their plans by a general onslaught; but nobly and heroically did the valiant settlers fight for their wives and little ones. Many, however, fell before the fort was reached, and the gate closed between them and danger; and on the pages of history this struggle is known as the Massacre of Yellow Medicine Agency. On the same day, the minions of Little Crow, Inkpaduta and Little Priest, scattering out over the country, began a general massacre. Acton, in Meeker county, really became the scene of the first bloodshed, if we except that at the Hermit Hut, the home of the Boy Brigade. Fort Ridgely was closely besieged, and the country to the south overrun. The call to arms rung through the North, and everywhere the hardy young yeomanry of the land left the plow within the furrow and the harvest ungleaned and rushed to

battle. But history has recorded all the main facts of this terrible Indian outbreak. We have only to deal with one of the chains of incidents consequent upon the war, and which has escaped the notice of the historian.

When Emma joined her friends at the Openings, after the Eagle had rescued her by shooting down her captor, her first words were:

"Oh, they have got Maggie! the Indians have captured her!"

Before any one could respond, the savages burst from the woods, and all sought shelter in flight. Not until all those that had escaped were inside of the fort was the subject of Maggie's capture brought up. Then the father of the missing girl sought out Emma, and from her learned the particulars of his daughter's capture. But she carefully omitted telling the object that had taken Maggie and her alone into the woods.

Mr. Harris's agony and suspense became intense. The savages surrounded the fort, and there was no escape until darkness should set in. The sun was still two hours high, and during the time spent in waiting for the shadows of night, the distracted father made preparations for going in search of his child. A number of friends volunteered to go with him, and among them were Ivan Le Clercq and his four boon companion.

There was one person among the band of besieged that noticed a wild look of uneasiness upon the face of Ivan and his party; and had it not been for the general excitement that prevailed among the crowd, others might have noticed that their looks were the outgrowth of a guilty conscience. Even their movements and very actions denoted guilt; and finally they went to one side and entered into a secret conversation—very suspicious under the circumstances.

"Boys," said Ivan, glancing furtively around him, "I'm afraid an awful crime rests upon our heads."

"You mean 'bout that Sure Shot Seth affair, don't you?" asked Rube Johnson.

"Yes; the Indians, I expect, found him and killed him," said Le Clercq.

"I've thought of that, too," added Gus Stewart.

"Mebby, though," said Abe Thorn, "Maggie and Emma let him loose before the Indians came; you know Emma run out of the woods near where we left him."

"S'pose we ask Emma," said Rube Johnson.

"Heavens, no!" replied Ivan "for if he didn't get away, that'll let the whole secret out; and if he should be found dead we might get our necks stretched."

"We might ask her if she seen him," said Gus Stewart.

"No," persisted Ivan; "we don't want to say a word about him, for all know that we were away when the shootin'-match begun, and if we should go to askin' any questions, it might raise suspicion at once. Just keep still, and when I get out of this fort, I'll slip out into the woods and see if he is there yet."

Thus the matter was settled for the time being, and finally, when darkness set in, the father of the captive girl, followed by Ivan and party, and also Tom Grayson and Harry Busted, stole out of the fort, and away into the woods without discovery by the red-skins.

When near the point where they tied Sure Shot Seth to the tree, Ivan whispered to one of his companions:

"I'm goin' to drop out of the crowd now and slip over to the tree; and if I don't overtake you in ten minutes, why, you will know that I can't find you, and so give the hoot of an owl; and if I hear, I'll answer."

"All right, Ivan," answered his friend.

Ivan dropped behind the party, and finally he turned to the left and went off in another direction. It was so extremely dark in the deep, dense woods

that the absence of the youth was unnoticed, and, with the silence of shadows, the party pushed cautiously on.

Le Clercq crept softly along through the darkness of night with the stealth of an assassin. His heart lay like a leaden weight in his breast, and his breath came in gasps. The fear of discovering himself a murderer worked like a horror upon his mind; and there was nothing in the blackness of the night, nor the solitude of his surroundings to inspire him with aught else than the gloomiest forebodings.

He was well acquainted with every foot of the ground he was traversing, and, notwithstanding the darkness, he moved directly toward the thicket where he had left Sure Shot Seth. When within a few yards of the tree to which they tied the young trapper, he paused and listened. But all was silent as the presence of death. A chill passed over his form, and the lump in his throat seemed to grow large and more depressing. He swallowed back the great lump in his throat, stretched out his hand, and touching the tree, ran his fingers downward along the trunk, feeling for the rope that girded it and the body of Sure Shot Seth, were the youth still there. Slowly he moved his fingers down, and when it came in contact with what he knew to be the rope, he started, with a low, gasping breath, as though his very soul had been suddenly convulsed.

The rope was still there, and he had no doubt now that Seth, living or dead, was on the opposite side of the tree, for the strands were drawn taut.

"Seth!" he called, in a low tone, but started back, crouching as with abject terror, for the sound of his own voice seemed re-echoed by the sepulchral voice of a dozen demons. Terror had wrought his brain to a frenzy. But now, wholly under the influence of fear, he moved around the tree, with his hand outstretched before him; and he had gone but a step or two when his fingers came in contact with something cold, unnatural to the touch. It was a human face, cold and clammy in death.

"Great God! he's dead!" involuntarily burst from the wretched boy's lips, and he turned to flee. But that terrible, invisible power seized upon him again, and held him by the side of his victim.

Ivan Le Clercq was suffering all the tortures of a guilty conscience. His heart grew sick and his head dizzy. Finally, the thought of detection and a more terrible punishment rose in his mind, and measures toward concealing the crime were suggested. He never stopped to think that his four companions were equally guilty as himself, but reaching forward he cut the rope that bound the body to the tree. The stiffened corpse fell heavily to the ground. Ivan took up the rope and tossed it away out into the brush; then he dragged the body into the undergrowth; and, with the reflection that the wolves would soon make identity impossible, he turned and fled from the scene of his crime, with the blood of a fellow-being resting upon his soul.

CHAPTER X.

THE LED TRAIL.

MR. HARRIS, accompanied by his young companions, pursued his way through the deep woods and lonely halls of the night. He knew not where they would find the captive maiden, but by scouting in all directions through the woods, hoped to gain some clew to her whereabouts.

Ivan Le Clercq's four companions hung on the rear of the party, eagerly listening for Ivan's call; but as the minutes wore away into an hour, and nothing of his approach being heard, the boys began to feel great uneasiness about him, and a thousand conjectures as to his prolonged absence, passed rapidly through their minds. Something of the same fear as that experienced by Ivan himself, began to smite the conscience of the four boys; and in tones of bitter anguish they expressed their regrets of having aided in the affair with Sure Shot Seth,

For hours the party journeyed on through the woods, but as Ivan failed to join them, Rube Johnson plucked his three companions aside, and said:

"Boys, Ivan has either been lost or else got into trouble; and I don't think we'd ort to desert him. We're all to blame, if Sure Shot Seth is dead; and I expect he is."

"Oh, I wish we hadn't tied him up to the tree," said Abe Thorne, regretfully.

"But then we didn't mean to have him killed," answered Gus Stewart.

"I know it; but then the law won't excuse ignorance, and if it's ever found out we'll be apt to hang like Zeke Snyder did," said Rube.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed his frightened, horrified companions.

Here the conversation dropped, for Mr. Harris and the rest of the party had stopped to wait till they came up.

"Giving out, boys?" asked Harris.

"Oh, no," answered Rube; "we can follow long as you can lead, Mr. Harris."

"Well, I'm beginning to think that it's useless tramping 'round here through the night, and propose we camp here until daybreak," answered the settler.

To this all assented, and then all but one lay down upon the earth to rest. Few eyes closed in sleep, however; the terrors and excitement of the day were too fresh in every mind to admit of the composing influence of slumber.

By daybreak every man and boy was ready to march, and without a bit of breakfast they took their lonely way through the woods, trusting to Providence for something to eat.

Fortunately, they struck an Indian trail soon after sunrise, and although there was nothing in the trail to convince them that Maggie was in the party, all concluded that, as the enemy were moving away from the Agency, they had her in custody.

They followed the trail for about two miles, when they struck the eastern shore of Lake Rock Island. Here it appeared that the Indian had taken to the water, and although the lake was small, it afforded an admirable place of shelter among its many rocky islands.

Mr. Harris suggested a division of the party to scout around the lake, but before this could be carried into effect, a "dugout," with five Indians, was seen creeping down toward the southern shore.

Our friends at once dropped back under cover of the woods, watching the red-skins narrowly. They soon reached the shore and landed, but had no captive with them; and so Tom Grayson, as well as his companions, were led to believe that Maggie had been secreted among the islands in the lake and as soon as the red-skins had passed out of sight, the pursuers began moving around the lake to the north. As they advanced, the shore became rough, broken and rocky, and in many places shelving and precipitous. The path they were following finally pressed them to the water's edge; and once there, there was no deviation to the right nor left, unless they scaled the heights or took to the lake.

They had filed along the narrow way until the west shore was reached, when Tom Grayson stopped and exclaimed:

"Boys, what if the Indians should cage us in here?"

The little party started with an exclamation; the idea had never entered their minds before.

"We cannot observe too much precaution," said Mr. Harris.

"No; if the enemy should see us in here, it would be all day with us," said Tom. "We could neither retreat nor advance, and of course, we couldn't climb this embankment; so the lake would be our only avenue of escape. Who knows but that we've been led into this?"

"Oh, gracious! look here!" suddenly burst from Rube Johnson's lips, as he pointed out across the water,

Every eye following in the direction indicated beheld a fearful sight.

The island was about fifty yards from the shore. It was a rocky bed with but little shrubbery. A narrow defile starting at the water's edge, terminated in a sort of low cavern, and in the passage, with her back toward them and her hands tied at her back, they beheld the form of Maggie Harris; while crouched before her in the mouth of the cavern was a huge panther with dripping jaws, glowing eyeballs, and quivering tail. The animal was ready for the leap, and waited only for a movement of Maggie as the signal.

The maiden seemed transfixed with horror, for she never moved nor uttered a sound indicative of fear.

The head of the terrible beast could be seen only to the left of Maggie's cheek and just over her shoulder. To change the position either to the right or left, the walls of the defile concealed the panther from view, while it was impossible to get above them on the bluff. The body of the beast could be seen distinctly enough, but it lay in such a position that a bullet shot at it would range backward without any fatal result, in which case the wounded creature would soon destroy the helpless girl. The only vital spot exposed was the right eye; but this could be reached from the shore only at the risk of Maggie's life; for this vital mark lay in a range with the maiden's cheek, and that range would not admit of an inch deviation.

To slay the beast without injuring Maggie would require the skill and nerve of an unerring shot. Tom Grayson was the best shot in the party, but he refused to shoot. His hands trembled. He raised his rifle once, but lowered it again, saying:

"I dare not shoot, Mr. Harris. To wound the panther would be sure to result in a horrible death to Maggie; and to shoot it in the head, a bullet must fairly graze the maiden's cheek."

"Oh, my God!" cried the distracted father, "my child will be torn to pieces! The moment she moves it will spring upon her! For heaven's sake, boys, make no noise that will draw her attention away. So long as she gazes into the eyes of the beast, it may not attack her. But, boys, won't some of you try a shot?"

"I'll try one," said the voice of a new-comer, and turning, all beheld that strange, wild youth who had won the prize at the shooting-match—the indomitable young Eagle-from-Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"Oh, my young friend!" cried Harris, "can you not slay that beast and save my child?"

"I can try it, sir," said the Eagle, and stepping forward he threw his new rifle to his shoulder and fired before any one had time for a second thought.

A scream rose upon the island—a scream from Maggie's lips, and was answered by a shout of joy from the father as he saw the panther stretched at full length along the earth, its limbs extended and quivering in the paroxysms of death.

Maggie turned toward her friends and uttered a wild cry of joy, then staggering, she fell—overcome by a sudden reaction from terror to joy.

"My poor child!" cried the father, "she has fainted, and will yet be dead ere I can get to her."

It was plain to all that Maggie's hands had been bound, and she left alone upon the island. What had induced the savages to do so was incomprehensible to our friends. Tom Grayson expressed a belief that there were savages concealed on the island, ready to entrap any one who might venture thereon; and as Maggie lay unconscious on the island, there was no way by which they could satisfy themselves of this fact before venturing over there.

"What do you think, my young friend?" said Mr. Harris, turning to the Eagle, who stood silently at one side reloading his rifle; "do you think there are savages concealed on that island?"

"I can't say, general, for sure; it seems queer that 'em red scavengers would leave her there alone unless they thought she would not get away, and that

no one would dare follow them there. But that's a question that must not keep assistance from her, and I'm going to board that log, and paddle over there."

Slinging his rifle well up on his shoulders he waded into the water, threw himself astride of a log that had floated there, and, with a large piece of bark, paddled out into the lake toward the island.

With eager impatience those on the shore watched the progress of the boy as he labored on through the waves.

The Eagle had nearly reached the island when a yell arose to the south, and glancing in that direction all saw, to their utmost horror, a dozen savages coming along the shore toward them.

Before one of our friends had time for a word or act, the voice of the Eagle cried out:

"Flee, friends, and trust Maggie's safety to God and me!"

There was really no alternative but to obey, and Mr. Harris and his young friends at once beat a hasty retreat in the direction they had come, pursued by the yelling savages.

The Eagle reached the island before the savages were within gunshot, and assisting Maggie to her feet, conducted her to a point of safety on the opposite side of the island.

"You see, Maggie," the youth said, "I am now having a chance to repay your kindness."

"Oh, my friend," she cried, "I am almost crazy. The Lord only knows what I have suffered since a captive. But tell me, did the savages destroy the settlement?"

"Not altogether, Miss Maggie," the lad answered; "though, several were killed before the fort was reached. But, remain here under cover, Maggie, and I will watch the movements of those savages."

He crept around the island and when he had discovered that the enemy was gone in pursuit of Harris and his party, the youth went down to the water's edge and washed the paint and dirt from his face and hands and then arranged his clothing in such a different, yet really natural way, that the boy was completely transformed from the odd, grotesque-looking Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak, to a different being; and that being was—*Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman!*

Maggie Harris was not ignorant of his identity. She and Emma Milbank had rescued him from the tree where Ivan Le Clercq and his companions had bound him; and that Ivan and his party might suffer the remorse that they now really were, these two brave and fearless girls had assisted Seth in arranging his disguise and keeping the secret. Unfortunately, their kindness to Seth had resulted in Maggie's capture; but never for a moment did the kind-hearted maiden regret what she had done.

Returning to Maggie, Sure Shot Seth, as we will now call the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak, was greeted with a smile.

"You have discarded your disguise?"

"Yes; I think it has served me through," he answered. "I don't think one of my five young enemies, or friends either for that matter, penetrated it. I affected so much when in their presence that no one could think it was I."

"Then you won the prize at the contest?" she said, her pretty eyes sparkling with admiration and delight, as she gazed upon the manly form and handsome face of the boy hero.

"Yes; without any trouble, Maggie, thanks to you and Miss Milbank. This is the gun, and with it I slew Emma's captor, then ran into the woods in hopes of saving you, but was too late."

The attention of the young people was suddenly drawn to the form of an Indian standing on the southern shore of the lakelet. He was over three hundred yards away, else Seth would have been tempted to try his new rifle upon him.

From appearances, he was a young war-chief decorated in all the paraphernalia of barbaric finery. His scarlet blanket flashed brightly in the sun, and

contrasted handsomely with the spotted jaguar-skin that girded his loins. His movements were somewhat awkward and stiff, as though unaccustomed to the dignity required of one of his position.

"There seems to be more of the white man than the red-skin about that fellow yonder," remarked Seth, "and if I mistake not, he is a white man."

They watched the chief until he had left the beach, then entered into a discussion of the events of the day. And thus the day wore away without any further demonstration on the part of the enemy; but about sunset a sharp and vigorous firing was heard in the woods east of the lake, and that a battle was going on, Seth had not a single doubt.

Night finally closed in and put an end to the firing; and now Sure Shot Seth became restless and uneasy. He knew the enemy would avail themselves of the cover of darkness to regain the island and their fair captive, and, as they were likely to come in force, it would be impossible for him to repel them. He had been unable to do anything toward the construction of a raft during the day, and now the darkness made it almost impossible. His only hopes lay in Maggie's friends coming to their relief before the Indians got there.

The moon would not be up before ten o'clock, and the gloom was rendered more intense by the gray mist that hung over the lake.

Seth silently paced the shore in eager anticipation of the approach of friends, ever and anon halting to listen for some sound. But a deep silence reigned. Not a breath of air was stirring—not a ripple chafed the island.

With her shawl drawn hood-like over her head, Maggie, tired and hungry, sat under a ledge within the sound of her young protector's footsteps.

Suddenly the discharge of firearms burst upon the night, heavy, sullen, and stunning; and was followed by yells and groans that fairly chilled the blood in the veins of Seth and Maggie.

Silence succeeded the murderous discharge of weapons. Not a sound could be heard, and what the result of the collision had been, Seth could not tell. But in the course of a few minutes the sound of waves breaking upon the island became distinctly audible. As there was no air stirring, our friends knew a boat must be approaching.

In a breathless silence they waited and listened. Soon the faint dip of a paddle was heard. Seth strained his eyes into the gloom, and was soon enabled to make out the dimmest outlines of a long boat creeping toward them across the lake.

The danger that threatened the young folks seemed to strengthen their eyesight, or else, at this juncture, it became somewhat lighter, for they were now enabled to make out the dark length of a long "dug-out," with three persons seated in it, quite distinctly.

The prow of the craft soon touched the island when the occupants landed, and having drawn the boat partly upon the beach, turned and moved cautiously away across the island. They passed within a few paces of Seth and Maggie; and no sooner were they out of sight than Seth whispered:

"Now's our time, Maggie. Let us jump into their boat and flee."

Maggie made no dissent, but taking hold of Seth's arm, permitted herself to be led to the boat. Stepping into the craft Seth assisted the maiden in and to a seat. But the instant she sat down she uttered a little cry of terror, for her seat moved under her—a savage, who lay curled up in the craft evidently for that very purpose, sprung to his feet and uttered a yell. But it was his last. Scarcely had the sound died upon his lips ere Seth's revolver flashed in his face, and he fell overboard into the lake, his limbs beating the water in his last agonies.

But Sure Shot Seth now found himself in a dilemma from which there was no escape. Before he could get the dug-out off, or seek shelter among the rocks, the three savages were upon him. He turned and met them, revolver in hand. One of them shot

past him, and, leaping into the boat, seized Maggie. Seth was standing up in the prow at the time, and the impetus with which the savage landed in the dug-out shot it out into the lake so abruptly that Sure Shot was pitched forward, headforemost, upon the beach.

As the youth fell, he fired his revolver and killed one of the remaining warriors; but before he could regain his feet the other had grappled, and together they fought in deadly embrace upon the beach.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DISGUISED CAPTOR.

MAGGIE was thrown almost prostrate by the sudden lurch of the boat, and before she could recover herself, she found that she was in the power of a savage, who, in plain English, said:

"Not a word, or I'll smother you."

Filled with terror, she sunk half-unconscious in the wet bottom of the boat, while her captor took up the paddle and kept the craft moving out further and further from the island. The maiden knew not what had been the fate of her brave young companion. She could hear the sounds of a struggle somewhere, and supposed they proceeded from the island. She breathed a prayer for Seth's triumph, yet she felt there was little hope for him, boy that he was, contending with two powerful savages. In the midst of her devout supplications, a strange medley of cries rose upon the night, and was followed by a savage yell, the crash of firearms, and the shouts of combatants.

The savage ceased paddling, as if paralyzed by the sound; and, for a moment, he seemed undecided as to the course he should pursue. He dipped the paddle, turned and whirled the craft in one direction, then in another.

In a moment the chief regained his composure, and sent the boat rapidly toward the shore; but with a fickleness unbecoming a chief, he soon changed his mind again, and turned into a little island, and landed. He assisted Maggie from the boat, and conducting her to the interior of the island, spread his blanket upon the ground for her to be seated. Tired and weary, in both body and mind, the maiden availed herself of his proffered kindness; and when seated, he lifted the edges of the blanket and wrapped them about her shoulders.

"Let the white maiden rest easy, for no harm shall come to her now," the young chief said, in good English.

Maggie started at the sound of his voice, for it struck her as being familiar. She endeavored to recall the faces of the Indians she had known and heard during the days of peace; but among the many that had frequented the Agency, she could remember no face to which the voice belonged. Recovering her power of speech she answered:

"Why, then, have I been taken from my people?"

"Why does the maiden pluck the rose from the parent stem?" was his answer.

Maggie made no reply.

"It is because she loves the flower," the chief answered, "and that is why I have taken the white rose of the pale-faces."

"You were not with my captors last night," she answered.

"My warriors were," he rejoined. "Long has Hawk-Eyes loved the white maiden and wanted her for a wife. He has spared her life that she might brighten up his lodge with the light of her face."

"Then you may as well kill me here, for I will never be your wife," answered Maggie, indignantly.

"Let my white rose remember that her people are all dead, and that Hawk-Eyes is her best friend, now."

"Hawk-Eyes tells a falsehood!" reiterated the maiden, scornfully, "and I hate him for it."

"Ugh! the white rose has thorns that are concealed," the chief answered sarcastically, "but they are harmless," he added, mockingly.

"A brave chief would not mock a feeble, helpless

girl. He dare not face the friend I left on the island and speak thus to me."

"Hawk-Eyes fears not the dead," was the savage's reply, that fairly crushed the maiden's heart; but she bravely concealed her emotions from her tormentor. Upon reflection she took courage. She knew her captor's assertion was made without any positive knowledge as to whether Seth had been slain or not, for they had left before the struggle had been decided.

The discharge of fire-arms, the shouts, yells, and strange cries that rent the night soon after their departure from the island, had died out, and a deep silence reigned. Pretty Maggie noticed that her captor betrayed uneasiness, yet he endeavored to conceal it, in every way possible, from her.

Suddenly a shout rung across the lake, that seemed to increase the chief's fears, and he at once embarked in the dug-out for other quarters. Something in the sound he had heard convinced him that it was not safe to tarry longer; and what gave him uneasiness and fear, gave Maggie hope and courage.

The chief plied his paddle with extreme caution, and darted from one island to another.

Maggie sat in front of her captor, her head bowed, and her eyes fixed on the glassy water rippling out from the side of the boat.

They had passed two or three islands and finally reached the one furthest south. It was covered with a number of tall pines that cast long, wide shadows out upon the clear water. They were creeping through this long stretch of shadows when a cry suddenly and involuntarily burst from Maggie's lips. There was a single spot in the shadow where the moonbeams, struggling through the tree-tops, fell upon the surface, as bright as if concentrated there in a focus. In this patch of light, as they paused, Maggie beheld an upturned human face—a face white as that of a corpse and stained in spots with blood. She recognized the face; it was that of Sure Shot Seth!

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS CHARMER.

To return to the island where we left Sure Shot Seth engaged with a savage, is to follow up the events that have been rapidly crowding upon us.

The struggle of our hero had lasted but for a moment only, when he succeeded in getting the muzzle of his revolver against the savage's temple, and fired. This ended the hand-to-hand conflict; but scarcely had he time to realize his victory, ere he caught the dip of a number of oars and the heavy swash of a long bateau plowing its way through the water at a fearful speed.

Simultaneous with this discovery, the bark of a fox, the howl of a wolf, the scream of a panther, the hoot of an owl, the cry of a night-hawk and other sounds rose upon the night, filling the soul of Seth with joy; for in the sounds he recognized the presence of his friends, the Boy Brigade. With a shout he answered them, then ran around the island and met them where they landed. Maggie's father and Tom Grayson accompanied them, and almost the first words of the former was an inquiry after his child.

Seth had scarcely time to answer ere the savages landed on the opposite side of the island and with a yell came rushing across toward our friends. The moon now lit up the surroundings and the whites were enabled to see the dusky forms of the enemy quite distinctly; in an instant a dozen rifles rung forth on the night.

There was no telling how many fell, but, with a random discharge of their guns, the savages quickly sought shelter behind the rocks.

The red skins had evidently been surprised, or were ignorant of the number that confronted them; and the result of the collision could be determined now only by stratagem and cunning.

"To hole, ye gory critters!" yelled old Joyful Jim, who had allied himself to the Brigade, and numbered himself as "one of the boys."

A defiant yell answered him.

Only a wall of rocks running across the island like the fin of a fish's back now separated the enemies. On the Indians' side it rose perpendicular to the height of ten feet, and of our friends' side it was a little shelving and on the same height. It varied in width from ten to thirty feet. To pass from one side to the other they would have to go around the ends of the wall, which would force them close upon the water's brink. But neither party seemed desirous of gaining the opposite side for the sake of a fight. Each concluded to act upon the defensive.

In a few words Sure Shot Seth made known the circumstances under which he and Maggie Harris had been separated a few minutes before.

Mr. Harris groaned in spirit over the hope he had been so fondly cherishing of recovering his child.

"I'm going to try and get away from here at once," said Seth, "and hunt Maggie up. I dare say her captor will wait among the islands the result of his friends' attack here; and if so, I may creep around and rescue her. She was in the power of but one savage when I last saw her."

"Creepin' tarrapins!" exclaimed Joyful Jim; "thar's just about as much likelihood of your findin' that Ingin and gal to-night as thar is of old Inkpaduta becomin' an angel."

"I'll try it, nevertheless," answered Seth.

The young rifleman divested himself of his weapons and such outward clothing as he could dispense with. Then he crept down to the water's edge and entered the lake. He swam off on his back, his head and face alone being visible on the moonlit surface of the water. His friends trembled with the fear that the savages would see him and bring their guns to bear upon him. Nor were their fears without foundation. Seth was scarcely three rods from shore ere a rifle rung out over the wall, and a bullet, striking the water obliquely, skimmed along the surface of the lake. This shot was immediately followed by two more, that cut the water close to the face of the swimmer.

Those on the island were unable to cover his retreat. There was no way by which they could reach the top of the rock that separated them from the foe, while the latter were afforded this means by the slight inclination of their side of the wall. Not to be outdone, however, Hooseah, the Indian lad, suddenly darted out from under the ledge, and, uttering the sharp cry of a wolf, leaped straight into the air, at the same time throwing his rifle at a level before him; and just as his head came up even with the top of the rock, he fired. A yell of agony on the opposite side of the wall told how fatal had been his shot, notwithstanding the manner in which it had been made.

This caused a diversion in Seth's favor; and before another shot could be fired, the friends of the young rifleman had the pleasure of seeing him disappear around a little island in the distance.

Finding themselves defeated in slaying Seth, the savages mounted the rock, and, rushing across the top, thought to take the whites by surprise and shoot them down. But before they could fire, the Brigade darted under the ledge entirely out of sight, and gliding along the wall to each end, secured a position and opened fire on the red-skins, causing them to beat a hasty retreat to the other side.

"Yoon, ye rollicking smoky-skins of Satan!" yelled Joyful Jim; "jist come over on our side if ye want to be snaked into purgatory. We're the lolly-pops that can kink yer systems wusser than a green persimmon."

"Kape cool, Joyful Jim," said Teddy O'Roop, "and save yer fire for the struggle that's sure to come soon—wirra!"

A shadow passed over the speaker and a stone fell in the lake beyond.

"The bloody devils are beginning to throw stones

over here in hopes of crushing us," said Tom Grayson.

Our friends were again obliged to avail themselves of the protection of the shelving wall, for the stones were now raining down on their side like hail, while they had no chance to return the "compliment."

For fully five minutes the missiles hurtled through the air. Suddenly there was a crash. A stone had fallen into the canoe—a long, frail bark concern—and stove a hole through the bottom, rendering it perfectly useless. This left our friends in a rather precarious situation, and served to increase their fears.

A yell from the savages told their gloating triumph; but it was immediately answered by a strange medley of shouts and cries from the Brigade. The whites also began to return the shower of stones as soon as they dare venture from under the ledge, and the groans and cries of excitement which came from the opposite side told that the reds were being dangerously disturbed, as they had not the advantage of a shelter that their enemies possessed.

This hurtling of stones was kept up until it became unendurable by savage patience and fortitude, and with a wild yell they charged around the eastern end of the wall. The whites were not taken unawares, and a deadly struggle ensued. But it was brief as it was desperate. The savages were driven back to their own side, while a shout rung forth upon the air from the lips of the victorious Brigade.

"Och, now," exclaimed Teddy O'Roop, "and isn't it delicious fun, b'ys?"

"Tish fun very much," replied young Schultz.

"Hark! hark!" cried Justin Gray.

With bated breath all listened.

A sound, soft and weird as the strains of an Eolian harp, floated to every ear. Every sound became hushed by the magic power of the mysterious music.

A shadow fell across the rock that separated the foes—a vision appeared upon its summit. It was the vision of a woman, the author of these enchanting strains of melody.

The hazy moonlight, the sylph-like proportions of the figure; the gray, mist-like robe that enveloped it; the white face and flowing wealth of flaxen hair gave the mysterious creature upon the rock a vague, spiritual form, and enshrouded it in a nimbus that partook of the light of a celestial being. In her arms she held a harp over which her white fingers danced and flashed like ripples of sunshine; while her face, clothed in the radiance of womanly love, was lifted toward heaven, and her lips poured forth an accompaniment that would have melted the stoniest heart and soothed the wildest brain.

Neither whites nor reds had seen the strange musician approach; and where she had come from was a question beyond their comprehension.

Silent and unmoved, she stood upon the rock and sent forth those sweet, seductive strains, whose melody awoke a feeling in the breasts of the audience that they had scarcely ever experienced.

Thus for all of ten minutes the unknown continued to play; then, as the last note faded away like the vision of a dream, she turned, and in a tone soft as a flute's, said:

"Oh, why do my red and white friends fight and slay each other?"

A profound stillness followed. The question was repeated, and from the Boy Brigade came the response:

"We are enemies."

"But you are brothers—of the same human family," again spoke the angel of peace whose sweet young face looked down upon the astonished foes with heaven's serenity, while she clasped her white hands over her breast, and pitching her voice into an appealing tone, cried out: "Oh, my brothers! red and white; cease your struggle here. You are all brave, but this is not an honorable battle-field."

"The red-men have dug up the hatchet," said a savage, in a clear, full tone that was distinctly heard by the Brigade.

"Then go to the woods and fight where the van-

quished can have a chance for life," answered the fair unknown. "Already my red brothers have lost half of their friends, while my white brothers are strong as when they came. Go, red-men; take your boat and depart, and the Great Spirit will be pleased."

Under any other circumstances the savages would have received this request with derision; but their loss of men and impending destruction made them more considerate of her appeals.

"If we leave here, the pale-faces will slay us," said a warrior.

"I, Heaven's Messenger of Peace and Mercy, will, on behalf of my white brothers, promise you a safe retreat from this island. The pale-faces are not cowards, and they will respect a woman's wish."

"Fair bein'!" exclaimed old Joyful Jim, "of heaven, of earth, of air, or wherever ye mou't be from, we have no respect for a red-skin, I am sorry to say; but we'd be wusser than heathens not to respect the wish of an angel, wouldn't we, boys?"

"Yes, yes," was the unanimous response.

"Then, let my red brothers depart hence in peace," said the songstress.

The savages were only too glad to obey, and in a moment they all had embarked for the shore. They were scarcely a dozen rods from the island ere the maiden on the rock came nearer and said, in a natural tone:

"Repair your boat, friends, and flee, or you may never again have the chance."

She spoke excitedly, and her voice and form now seemed more of earth than heaven.

"Who in the wisdom of Solomon be you?" asked old Jim, glancing up at her with a quizzical look.

"Vishnia of the Valley," she answered, with an anxious, impatient gesture, at the same time glancing uneasily around her.

Several of the boys flew to the damaged boat, and, dragging it up on the beach, set to work to repair the injuries, which could only be effected by contributions of superfluous clothing stuffed into the gaping rent. While they were thus employed, Mr. Harris stood and conversed with Vishnia of the Valley.

"Vishnia, where do you reside?" he asked.

"In the valley of the Minnesota, with my father, whose mission on earth is love and truth, and the inculcation of the principles of peace and glory of God," she answered.

"But how came you here?" he asked.

"As I now depart," she said, and tripping down from the wall, she sprang into a canoe, that was so small her robe almost concealed it from view. Then lifting a light paddle, and wishing our friends a God speed, she darted away over the water and soon disappeared from view.

"All aboard!" cried one of the boys, as they launched the boat ready for departure.

The next moment all had embarked for the nearest point on the western shore of the lake, and where the tumult of battle had waged a few minutes before, the silence of death now reigned.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET COUNCIL.

MAGGIE HARRIS was paralyzed by the sight of the face she had seen in the water. Unable to move, unable to cry out, she sat motionless, with fixed eyes staring at the little patch of moonlight.

Hawk-Eyes used the paddle nervously and awkwardly, which would have been evidence to any one versed in the nature of the Indian that he—the chief—was *not* a red skin.

Slowly they made their way toward the southern shore, and were already within the deep border of darkness that skirted the margin of the water when there was a sudden commotion alongside the boat; a dull, heavy blow, a groan, and the fall of a body into the water. The boat rocked violently; Maggie was almost thrown into the lake, and before she could recover from her fright, a voice said:

"Maggie?"

A low, subdued cry burst from Maggie's lips, for she recognized the voice as that of Sure Shot Seth. The youth had swum silently up to the boat, and by a well-directed blow knocked the chief overboard. Then having made his presence known, he sprung into the boat, took up the paddles and drove the boat ashore.

Having landed and assisted Maggie from the canoe, he conducted her rapidly away around the lake. He was satisfied that he had not slain the young chief, and that his cries would soon set a horde upon their trail; and so the greatest precaution and haste were essential to escape.

They had gone but a short distance when the sound of voices fell upon Seth's ears. He stopped and listened, and, by the sound of the speaker's voice, discovered they were savages. A groan told him that there were wounded warriors among them; and he felt satisfied they were the Indians who had engaged his friends at the island.

A figure swept suddenly past them, going toward the Indians. His movements were heavy and clumsy—evidence of excitement and want of savage precaution. He was no Indian; of this Seth was assured, and a moment later he found he was correct. The figure reached the Indians and began talking in plain English, but in an excited tone.

"Seth, do you not recognize that voice?" asked Maggie, clinging closer to her young friend.

"It sounds familiar, but I really can't place it," answered Seth.

"It's the voice of Hawk-Eyes, that Boy Chief, whom you threw overboard."

"Sorry, then, that I didn't kill him."

"Seth, he is not an Indian. He is a white boy in disguise," affirmed the maiden.

"What? Hawk Eyes a white boy and a Sioux war-chief?" exclaimed Seth.

"Yes."

"Then we have more to fear than if he was a savage. A white Indian has a less human heart than a genuine Indian."

"Where, then, shall we go?" asked the maiden.

"Let us bear off to the left, and edge around to the north. There is no telling where we will be safe now. The wood is full of enemies, and the Agency closely besieged."

"Seth, you are endangering your life for me," said Maggie; "it is better that I—"

"Not a word, Maggie," interrupted the gallant youth; "it is the greatest pleasure I ever enjoyed to be enabled to protect you. Moreover, I owe you all this; had it not been for you and Emma, I would have been slain there where Le Clercq and his companions bound me. It was your own hands, Maggie, that liberated me from that tree, and had you not gone there for that purpose you would never have been captured. So you see I am indebted to you."

"I blame Ivan Le Clercq for all our present troubles."

"And at the same time, Maggie, I can't say that I am sorry he acted as he did," said Seth, in a slightly hesitating voice.

"Why, Seth?" she asked, in surprise.

"Because I might never have met you."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, and something of the truth flashed across her mind, sending the warm blood coursing through her veins.

They moved on a few moments in silence; but the thoughts of each were busy. A dozen times Maggie asked herself if Seth had been actuated in his motives of kindness toward her by a feeling greater than friendship. She wanted only the assurance of this fact to make her supremely happy, notwithstanding their danger. On the other hand, Seth was laboring under the same anxiety and uncertainty.

They moved slowly onward through the lonely halls of the forest. Weary miles were traversed; but they brought the tired fugitives to no point of safety.

The morning dawn was fast breaking into the light

of another day, when the glow of a fire burst suddenly upon their gaze. It was not more than twenty rods away, and it required no second glance to tell Seth that it was the camp-fire of whites. There were four of them—all boys; and to the surprise of both Seth and Maggie, they beheld the companions of Ivan Le Clercq. They were seated before the fire, apparently in close conversation.

Seth was undecided as to the course he should pursue; but, before he could arrive at any conclusion, he saw a young Indian chief emerge from the woods and approach the boys with quick strides.

Maggie uttered a little cry at sight of him, while Seth's hand sought the weapon at his belt.

It was Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, who was welcomed by the four youths to their camp-fire.

Sure Shot Seth was astonished by what he had seen, and trembled for the safety of the fair girl at his side. They occupied a position not altogether secure from the keen eyes of a savage, and the first act of the youth was to retrace his footsteps and gain the friendly cover of a dense thicket. Then he turned to Maggie and said, in a subdued tone:

"Maggie, I must know more about those boys. There is some treachery going on, and if I can learn the object of their interview with the chief, I may be able to save those at the Agency. I am going to try to overhear their interview."

"Be very, very careful, Seth," Maggie answered.

With a word or two of caution, Seth moved away. Maggie watched him out of sight, then sat down.

He approached the party, keeping a clump of bushes between. He gained a position within ear-shot, and pausing, listened. He heard Hawk-Eyes ask:

"Do the pale-face youths know that Sure Shot Seth is dead?" He spoke in good English, but in a tone evidently disguised and unnatural.

"We found the skeleton of one whom we believe was Sure Shot Seth," answered Rube Johnson.

"And as sure as it is found out, we'll all catch an invitation to court," added Gus Stewart.

"Between the Indians and the fear of punishment, we'll have no rest for—well, God only knows how long," said Abe Thorne, in a tone of penitence. "I wish we had left him alone, for after all, the eaglet from Sky Puncher-Peak got the gun."

"Do not fear the Indians," said Hawk-Eyes, "for if you show them no hostility, I will assure you of their friendship."

"Good!" exclaimed Rube. "Why not join the Indians at once and be done with it?"

"That would never do. I want you to work for me in the Agency. You can place both Maggie and Emma in my power, and then you will have nothing to fear from them. I expect to remain an Indian chief. But a few days ago, Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, was slain, and I have taken both his name and rank, and have sworn to exterminate half of Minnesota's whites."

"Just so, my worthy young villain," said Sure Shot to himself. "I think you'll have to swear to that again."

"But," continued Johnson, "we are afraid to return home, and had concluded to skulk and hide around in the woods until assured it 'd be safe to go back."

"I'm for just going right home and makin' a clean breast of it all," said Abe Thorne, "and take the risk. We can tell 'em that we war in fun with Seth, and mebbey they'll let us off. I'd rather be shot than hidin' 'round in the woods and startin' and shudderin' at every sound just like a guilty murderer."

"Then I suppose you'll desert us, turn State's evidence, and let us swing," suggested Ches Pagan.

"No, I will do no such thing; I want to git all out of this scrape in an honorable way," persisted Abe.

"You'll get out in no such way as you propose," replied Rube, indignantly, "for you can't make crime honorable."

"I have a right to do as I please," was Abe's reply.

"You may have the right, but not the liberty," was the threat of Hawk-Eyes.

"I want to do what is honorable with you all; but I will not be driven to add crime to crime. I have gone just as far as I'm going in this matter, and shall return to the Agency. If you fellows go with me, all right; if not, all right. I shall keep silent, however, until I am called upon to tell the truth in this matter."

"Yes, you confounded coward," exclaimed Rube, "you mean to betray us all!"

"I mean to do just what I say, and you can't scare me into anything else, either," was Abe's response, given in a tone of unflinching determination.

"Then go seek your skim-milk mates—go!" and Rube spoke in a tone of authority.

Abe Thorne rose to his feet, his boyish face flushed with anger and his eyes blazing with indignation. Abe had not been hopelessly lost in wickedness, nor had his companions, but he was by nature both kind and honest. He was rather wild and reckless, yet had no desire to commit crime; and he shrunk from the idea of trying to conceal the supposed death of Seth in the way proposed by Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief.

Taking up his rifle, the youth spoke a few parting words to his companions, then turned and moved away.

The eyes of the Boy Chief followed his retreating form with a fierce, murderous look, that caused Seth to start with sudden fear. That violence was uppermost in the young villain's mind there was not a doubt in the world.

Seth watched the conspirators until Abe was out of sight, then he turned and crept back to where Maggie was waiting for him.

"Maggie," he said, his voice betraying no little surprise, "I am completely shocked, for I have made a discovery that will no doubt surprise you. *Ivan Le Clercq and Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, are one and the same person!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

WAS IT THE SHOT OF AN ASSASSIN?

A RIFLE-SHOT rung suddenly through the forest, starting Seth and Maggie with sudden fear. The report was followed by a groan, and that Abe Thorne's friends had assassinated him, Seth had not a single doubt.

"I am afraid," said Seth, "that they have murdered poor Abe, for they quarreled with him, and he left them."

"If Hawk-Eyes is Ivan Le Clercq, as you say, he will not hesitate to do anything," replied Maggie. "Why are you afraid they have killed Abe Thorne?"

Seth briefly narrated all that he had heard at the camp-fire conference.

Scarcely had he concluded, ere a peculiar cry rung forth upon the air—a cry that sent a smile of recognition over his young face. Then, from different quarters among the wooded hills, rose half a dozen answering cries, plain and distinct.

"Ah! my friends, the Boy Brigade, are near," said Seth.

A fierce savage yell rung through the forest, then the sharp, stinging report of a rifle followed, only to be succeeded by other shots fired in rapid succession.

The boy conspirators started to their feet, and, like so many frightened deer, bounded away into the woods, while Hawk-Eyes turned and crept through the shadows in the direction whence the sounds of conflict came.

"Maggie," said Seth, "my friends are near and engaged with the savages. You will be safe here for a while, and I will go to their assistance; but return to you soon. If we succeed in defeating the foe, our escape will be certain."

"Go, Seth, to your friends' assistance. I will await your return," said the brave little maiden.

Seth crept away through the woods, and soon came in sight of the combatants. He placed a whistle to

his lips and blew a sharp blast upon it. Instantly, from different quarters, rose the answering cry of the Boy Brigade.

At this moment the savages on the opposite bluff charged from the opposite direction.

Seth took to his heels, fleeing in the direction of his friends.

He soon came to where his friend, the Beaver, was, and together the two ran on toward the valley. Others of the Brigade fell in with them, and by the time they had gone fifty rods, the whole of the band, including Maggie Harris's father and Tom Grayson, had joined them.

The Indians, now to the number of nearly a hundred, were in pursuit of them. Sure Shot Seth led the way toward the precipitous bluff that overhung the head of the valley, and which he knew to be honeycombed with numerous caverns and subterranean passages where one might elude an enemy with ease. To reach the mouth of one of those passages required but a few moments, and no sooner were they under cover than all turned and poured a deadly volley into the ranks of the advancing enemy. A number of the latter fell; but their death only served to madden their surviving friends, who, like demons, came on toward the cavern, determined on exterminating the band of whites.

That the savages were ignorant of the advantage of which our friends had availed themselves, was evident from the incautious manner in which they approached. The Brigade fell back a few paces from the entrance, and, facing about, waited until the foe came up, when from the black mouth of the vault they poured another withering volley. This caused the enemy to retreat with a full knowledge of the situation, and, for the time being, all relapsed into silence.

"Well, here we are cooped up like so many fowls," said Justin Gray, "and are likely to remain so for a while."

"Night let us out," said Hooseah, the Indian lad.

"What of Maggie, Seth?" asked Mr. Harris, recovering breath.

"I left her alive and well," was the answer; "but God knows what will be her fate ere we escape from this place."

"Oh, my child! my child!" groaned Harris, in bitter despair.

"Let us not despair; perhaps we can tunnel out," said Seth.

"Let us try at once," suggested Tom Grayson.

With Teddy O'Roop, Sure Shot Seth repaired to the extremity of the cavern, and with knives and tomahawk began the uncertain task of digging out. Their labor was attended with difficulty. The darkness prevented them working with dispatch. The knife and tomahawk clinked on the stones, and sparks of fire were emitted by the contact. If they were near the surface, and an enemy should happen to pass that way, he would be sure to hear the sound of their working; so, altogether there was nothing to insure escape, even should they succeed in working a way out. However, Seth resolved to lose no time in testing the result, for the pretty, fair face of Maggie Harris stood before his mind in constant appeal for help and protection.

They worked diligently for nearly an hour; but scarcely had the sounds of their own blows died away ere Teddy grasped Seth by the arm and in an excited whisper said:

"Whist, Sith, me b'y!"

They listened intently. They heard a sound. It was so very faint they could not locate the point from which it came. It seemed dull and far off.

"It must be the echoes of our knife and tomahawk still reverberating through the cavern," said Seth.

"Niver, lad, niver. Press yer ear against this wall and ye can hear something or some one digging."

Seth did as requested. He started, with the reply:

"You are right, Ted; there is some one digging

within a foot of our cavern wall. But who can it be?"

As if in answer to the question, the left wall of the cavern fell inward, revealing a passage beyond. A cloud of dust rose in the cavern, but through the black fog thus pervading the place a dim light suddenly appeared, and behind it was a fearful human visage!

"Holy Mother!" burst from Teddy's lips, as his eyes fell upon the horrible-looking visage, bloated and distorted.

Sure Shot Seth started back in amazement, his eyes fixed upon the face just visible, through the cloud of dust, in the lurid, wavering light clutched in a bony hand.

The face was contorted like that of the demon of rage. It was covered with dirt and blood, while the wet, matted hair hung in twisted, serpent-like locks about his face, like the hair of the Furies.

"Haw! haw! haw!" burst in a deep, sonorous peal from his lips, the sound starting a shudder in the hearers, as the echoes repeated the fiend-like guffaw over and over in a hundred places throughout the cavern.

Seth grasped his revolver. The click of the lock brought the man to a sense of his situation, and in a more natural tone, he said:

"Boys, don't you know me? Can't you perceive who I be?"

"Joyful Jim!" exclaimed Seth, dropping his weapon.

"The same," exclaimed the old man, creeping through the opening into the retreat; "though I'm to-t'ly bumfusticated."

"What in the name of goodness have you been doing?" asked Seth, completely astounded.

"Havin' an old roarin' time of it by myself among the red-skins and hornits," answered Jim.

"And how came you here?"

"I came through that back passage, which, with a little digging, let me in here. I alers thought that but a few feet separated the two caverns, but never had occasion to find out," he answered.

"Good! then our escape is certain."

With as short delay as possible, the little band made haste to vacate the cavern. Led by Joyful Jim, they filed away through the dark passage.

The savages seemed to have instinctively anticipated their intentions and swarmed in after them. Their yells echoed in tones of thunder through the chambers of the great vault. But nothing daunted, our friends pushed on. They finally reached the rear opening of the chamber. All halted just within, and sent old Jim out to reconnoiter. In five minutes the signal agreed upon was given, and the little band filed out and joined the scout.

"Now, which way?" asked the old man.

"Toward Lake Luster," answered Seth, and taking the lead, headed toward the southwest.

Savage cries, announcing the escape of the Boy Brigade, rose upon the night. From all points they were answered; but, silent as phantoms, our friends stalked on through the darkness, led by the indomitable young rifleman.

Seth gradually bent his course so as to bring him back to where he had left Maggie Harris; but, when he reached the point and found her gone, he said nothing but pushed on into the valley.

They soon entered what was known as the Black Woods—a deep, dark, and almost impenetrable forest, where the shadows were eternal. Stately pines reared their heads heavenward like giant sentinels; the mold in which their roots found nourishment was heavy and sodden; the atmosphere damp and depressing. Animal life seemed banished from the place, and a depressing, foreboding silence reigned there.

But this silence lasted only for a short period—a few minutes—ere voices could be heard calling to each other, from out the depths of the woods, in unnatural tones. They were savages.

Suddenly a sharp and sullen boom, not unlike that

of a cannon, burst upon the night, its echoes rebounding from hill to valley and fading away in quavering intonations.

The Boy Brigade stopped and discussed the matter of the noise; but as they could form no conception as to its meaning, they pushed on through the woods. They had journeyed nearly a mile when, all of a sudden, a broad expanse of dazzling light burst upon their eyes.

They stood upon the shore of Lake Luster—the tiny jewel that sparkled upon the bosom of the grim Black Woods, as it lay bathed in the mellow beams of the full, round moon.

CHAPTER XV.

WHITHER SHALL SHE FLY?

MAGGIE HARRIS was a brave and peerless girl. When left alone to await her young protector's return, she stilled the beating of her heart, and reconciled her mind to her situation. She could hear the firing of guns back in the woods, and knew that a desperate conflict was going on. Then, when the savages charged the Boy Brigade, and their yell rose loud and fierce upon the air, she was filled with a grave fear. But, before she had time for much speculation, a movement in the bushes arrested her attention.

She turned and beheld an object creeping along the earth, with great difficulty; and a second glance told her it was a human form. Her first impression was that a savage was creeping stealthily upon her. A cry rose to her lips, but with supreme effort she restrained it. She recognized the voice, but not the face. The latter was haggard and covered with blood.

It was Abe Thorn.

He was wounded, and bleeding to death.

Maggie moved toward him, all the kindness of her young heart awakened by sympathy for the wounded boy.

"You, Maggie? Are you alone?" asked the youth, in a feeble tone.

"Yes; but Abe, what ails you?" asked the maiden, shuddering.

"Oh, Maggie!" he cried, in a feeble tone, as he sunk upon the earth, overcome with sheer exhaustion from loss of blood; "I've been shot, and I'm going to die."

"Who shot you?—the Indians?"

"No; one whom I always knew was treacherous, yet whom I considered my friend—Ivan Le Clercq, who is now an Indian chief."

"My friend suspected as much; but, Abe, let me bind up your wounds and take care of you till help comes."

"No power on earth can save me; that I know," replied Abe. "Our troubles all come about on account of Sure Shot Seth. The day of the shooting-match Ivan and some more of us caught Seth and tied him up to a tree, so's he couldn't win the prize. But the Indians came before we could release him, and he was killed while bound helpless to the tree."

"Are you sure he was killed, Abe?" questioned Maggie.

"Yes; Ivan found his form stript of flesh still lashed to the tree. The wolves had eaten him. And so you see, Maggie, I die with a heavy load upon my soul, and I'm afraid the good Lord will not forgive me."

"He will not punish you for the death of Sure Shot Seth, Abe," Maggie answered, "for Seth still lives."

Abe started as if from a dream.

"Sure Shot Seth alive!" he exclaimed. "Maggie, are you not mistaken?"

"I am not; he left me but a few minutes ago."

"Then I can die in peace," he said, again sinking to the earth: "but, Maggie, you had better not remain here. There are many Indians in the Black Woods bent upon the destruction of all the whites they can find."

"I cannot leave you, Abe, suffering as you are."

"I can't suffer long, Maggie, for I am nearly gone."

Overcome with emotion, Maggie sat down by the dying youth, and, burying her face in her hands, wept bitterly.

A silence, broken only by the maiden's sobs, ensued. When Maggie again turned to Abe his eyes were half-closed, his lips were slightly parted, while his face wore that calm, yet awful expression of death.

"Poor Abe!" sobbed the maiden; but she started at the sound of her own voice. It sounded hollow and unnatural. She glanced wildly around her. The moan of the woods, and the presence of death, all conspired to fill her soul with horror. She started to her feet, then turned and fled the spot like a frightened fawn.

She ran on deeper and deeper into the shadows of the Black Woods, as though there were some irresistible power drawing her into their gloomy labyrinths. The shadows were deep as twilight, though now and then a faint stray beam of light, dim and ghostly, fell across her path.

An indescribable horror lent speed to her feet, and she glided on until her steps were arrested by a blaze of light bursting upon her from before. She found the forest had terminated in a broad sheet of glimmering water. She stood on the shore of Lake Luster. She glanced over the little sheet and around its margin. No sign of life was visible. The place seemed wrapt in profound solitude.

Half-exhausted and half-delirious by her violent exercise, Maggie sunk down under a tree. She leaned her throbbing head against the trunk, and clasped her hands over her beating heart. She closed her eyes and sunk into mental repose. She inhaled the fresh air and the sweet essence of the breeze among the tree-tops, she sunk into a gentle slumber, that was as sweet and refreshing as ambrosia to the lips. Even the sense of hearing was enraptured as she slept. The soft, flute-like notes of music fell upon her ears in dreams. Bright visions and enchanting scenes passed in rapid review before her, like the figure of a panorama.

Finally she awoke. Was it mockery?—all bitter disappointment that had attended her refreshing slumber? No, not at all; the sweet breath of the woods was there, and low, soft and melodious the weird and solemn refrain of a harp came to her ears. She started up in partial bewilderment, gazing wildly around her. She bent her head and listened. Nothing save the ravishing strains of music, broke the silence. They seemed to issue from a cluster of bushes along the shore to the left, and as if unable to overcome the weird fascination of the sound, she turned and moved toward it.

She soon came to a little bay surrounded by a deep fringe of green-foliaged trees, whose boughs overhanging formed an Arcadian bower over the still placid waters of the bay. Upon the bosom of the latter rested a strange-looking craft, resembling the long, narrow roof of a house with gables. A door opened in the side of this roof-like structure, and in front of it sat two persons, an old man and a young girl.

The former sat with his face buried in his hands, apparently absorbed in deep reverie; while the maiden, with snowy fingers flashing over the strings of a Spanish harp, called forth those wild, weird strains of celestial music.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PALACE OF OLD NEPTUNE.

ENCHANTED by the music and startled by the scene, Maggie Harris stood silent and motionless, listening to the one and studying the other. The player was a young and beautiful girl, possibly not over eighteen years of age. Her rare loveliness, her sylph-like form, her queenly grace, and air of high-born accomplishments contrasted strangely with the surrounding scene. Her eyes were of a soft brown, large and lustrous, and full of tenderness

and love. She was robed in a gown of misty blue with a white collar around the snowy neck. Her golden hair hung like silken floss down her back. A tiny golden clasp at the throat, and a modest little rose in her hair were the only ornaments the fair creature wore. She sat near the old man, her very attitude, the poise of the head, and the manner in which she held her harp, all were positions of exquisite grace and ease.

The man was upward of sixty years of age, and in type and dress the personification of old Neptune. His face, his beard, his hair, and even his trident spear, bore a striking resemblance to those of the God of the Sea. His brow wore the contracted furrows of care and deep thought. By his side lay some mechanical contrivance, consisting of wheels, rods and shafts of copper; and by these sat a kit of tools, such as would only be used by a master mechanical hand.

The craft upon which those two mysterious people were seated was as odd as it was ingenious. It was about twenty feet long by ten in width, and sloped gradually from the water to a point like the comb of a house-roof, though it was plainly evident that some portion of its square was submerged. The whole was plated with galvanized sheet iron which gave it a white, clouded color. On the top were four small tubes resembling chimneys, though it was not possible that all were used as such. Maggie regarded the strange sight for some time with speechless emotion. She had often heard of Lake Luster and the foreboding solitude that surrounded it; but never had she heard of these people, who had, from all appearance, dwelt there for some time.

While the fugitive maiden stood undecided as to the course she should pursue, the old man started up, seized his trident and thrust it into the water. A smile overspread his face—a smile that drove away all those hard lines, and relieved the fears of Maggie Harris. As the old man drew back his spear, our heroine saw a large fish impaled upon it, struggling in the grasp of the terrible barbs.

Releasing the fish and securing it from escape, the old man again relapsed into silence, while the maiden continued at the harp. Five minutes, perhaps, had passed, when he again threw his spear and drew in a second fish. While he was releasing it, the maiden ceased playing, and, walking to the old man, said:

"Oh, what a nice fish, father! The two will be ample for our wants for a day or two. The poor thing, how it struggles. It seems a pity to kill them, after having enticed them here by the enchantment of music."

"God has placed the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea at our command; and we have only to take them when our needs demand them. A slice of venison, or a roasted fowl, would be a welcome change at our table; but these are perilous times, and the report of a rifle might guide enemies to our retreat."

"Enemies? what enemies have we, father?" questioned the maiden.

"There's no telling; the savages will doubtless regard all whites who do not join their ranks as enemies; and, if so, we will be in danger, for I will never bear arms against my countrymen."

"Why not observe a strict neutrality, father?"

"This would be impossible with the red-skins. They have no knowledge, in their savage ignorance, of civilized warfare, and we could not convince them that, as neutrals, we had any rights they were bound to respect."

"Why not quit Lake Luster till peace is restored, father?"

"I could not think of it Vishnia; especially, while upon the eve of success in my invention that must give me fame and wealth through all ages to come."

"But, father, if there is a war between the North and South, the sale of your self-propelling, self-acting torpedo may give you both fame and wealth."

Now would be a good time to introduce your invention."

"Not very daughter. The war between the North and South will not be a naval war. It will be principally on land," the old man replied.

"At any rate, why waste more of your life over a project that you may never achieve, and which has ruined the life and mind of many a wise genius?"

Maggie heard all this conversation, and was not a little surprised. She saw that the old man had secluded himself there to work out in secret the complication of some great invention. His conversation revealed this, and Maggie had resolved not to intrude upon the privacy of his beloved schemes, and was about to turn away when she heard a rustle in the shrubbery to her right. Turning her eyes, she beheld a clump of bushes carefully parted, and a painted savage face appear in the opening.

A cry rose to her lips, and like a deer she darted from her concealment, and ran toward the water. She had gone but a few paces, however, when the savage overtook her. He grasped her by the arm and arrested her flight; then he lifted her in his naked, brawny arms and turned to flee. But, before he had taken a dozen steps, something struck him in the back with a dull thud. A gasp escaped his lips, and with a convulsive quiver running through his whole form, he sunk heavily to the earth, falling across the unconscious form of Maggie.

A massive footstep approached from the lake, and the tall form of the mysterious old man of Lake Luster stood by the side of the dead warrior and the helpless maiden. Stooping, he seized the savage's form and hurled him aside, then from the body he withdrew his barbed spear, lifted Maggie in his strong arms and carried her aboard his boat. Scarcely had he done so when a fierce, savage yell burst upon the air, and a score of savages rushed from the woods to avenge their fallen comrade; but, before they could reach the water's edge, the boat was put in motion by some invisible means.

The savages fired at the craft, but their bullets glanced from the metal covering of the structure like hail from a stone wall; and, in a few moments more, it was even beyond rifle-range, out upon the bosom of Lake Luster.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRULY INFERNAL.

It was on the night following the events just narrated that we left the Boy Brigade on the shores of Lake Luster, then bathed in the mellow radiance of a full moon.

An exclamation of surprise and admiration escaped each lip as they gazed out over the little sheet and its dark-green border of forest trees.

"By mighty!" exclaimed old Joyful Jim, "if that ar'n't the most romantic scene I ever clapped my optics on. Why, she burns like a jewel on the black hand of a nigger gal. Lake Luster, did you say, Seth?"

"Yes; the water is almost transparent. In many places you can see the bottom and the fish sporting about; but this is nothing more than may be said of nearly all of Minnesota's thousand and one lakelets. Indian tradition has peopled Lake Luster with spirits of the departed, therefore it has been seldom visited by the living."

"That's good, and I hope they'll continue to observe this absence from the spirit lake while we're here," said Jim. "I've had enuff of hornits' javelins and Ingins' bullets to last me till next harvest."

"Wherever our trail leads, they'll be sure to follow, mind what I tell you," said Sure Shot Seth.

"Wharfore?" old Jim demanded.

"They are led by a white man; or rather a white boy, whose youth will be nothing in our favor. Ivan Le Clercq is unprincipled and bad. He has just enough Indian blood in him to make him blood-thirsty and revengeful; and enough of French to make him subtle in plotting and planning. Yes; in

Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, we have a powerful enemy, boys."

At this juncture, Hooseah, the Indian lad, who had been absent from the main party, reconnoitering, came running up in great excitement, and said:

"Bad Ingins—lots—on ahead!"

"Indeed?" exclaimed Seth; "are they watching for us?"

"No—watchin' big wigwam on the lake—see him float out from the shadows."

He pointed out over the lake, and all eyes turning in the direction indicated, beheld a long, triangular structure floating out from the border of shadows that lined the southern shore, into the moonlit waters.

"It's a tent!" exclaimed Mr. Harris.

"It looks like a tent; but it surely isn't one," answered Seth. "It appears to glimmer like a metal shield."

"It is moving quite fast, and yet I cannot see from whence it receives its motive power," said Harris.

The craft continued on into the open lake until it had gained the center, when it came to a stand. Then our friends saw a door open on the sloping side and a man appear from the interior. He stood in front of the door and gazed around him. The Brigade could see the outlines of a tall person with long beard and hair. In his hand he held a staff with a trident-spear on the end of it.

From the darkness along the shore a tongue of fire suddenly shot out, and the report of a rifle started the midnight echoes for miles.

"Och! and the bloody Ingins are firing on the stranger," said Teddy.

"Yes; and by that," answered Seth, "we are to understand that the stranger is an enemy of the red-skins, whatever he may be to us."

With an imperious wave of the hand, the old man on the raft turned and entered his boat; but soon he appeared again, bearing something in his arms.

Our friends stood watching his movements, and puzzling their brains as to who he was.

A boat suddenly crept out from the shadows of the east bank and moved toward the strange raft. There were five occupants in it. They were savages, and brightly flashed their paddles as they rose and fell in the water.

The man now rose to his feet, and in deep, thunderous tones warned the red-skins back. But they either did not understand him, or else heeded not his warning. Seeing this, the old fellow got down upon his knees and placed the article that he had brought out with him in the water. Our friends could see that it emitted a very faint glow not much larger than the coruscation of a firefly. No sooner was it placed in the water than it began to move—glide smoothly along the surface of the lake directly toward the red-skins.

"What now, in the name of Sodom, does that mean?" exclaimed old Joyful Jim. "See it, boys?—a little speck of fire creeping along to'rds that Injin boat?"

All answered in the affirmative.

"What do you opine it are?" he questioned.

None could tell. All were equally puzzled.

All watched with bated breath and fixed eye the moving speck of fire. The Indians, too, had discovered its approach, and sat holding their paddles in motionless hands, regarding the tiny object with silent attention.

Meanwhile, the old man on the boat stood with folded arms gazing after the moving speck, while a silence as deep and profound as creation's morn hung over all. It was a foreboding stillness.

Straight toward the red-skin's boat, which had not deviated a foot from its course toward the unknown raft, the floating spark made its way. The Indians were deeply puzzled by it, and although their minds were not unmixed with superstition re

garding Lake Luster, they affected no fear of the approaching object. It was so very small that no harm could possibly come of it; or, at least, this was the conviction that it forced upon our friends, as well as the red-skins.

A slight commotion agitated the savages as it neared them, and our friends saw the foremost warrior dip his paddle and turn the prow of the boat southward. But for this act, the floating light would have passed them slightly to the right; but the prow of the boat being turned across its path, it came in contact with the craft, when, horrors! a sheet of flame burst from the bosom of the lake under the boat, and a roar like the sudden burst of a volcano shook the night.

High up in the air flew water and fragments of the canoe and the riven forms of its human freight—so high that when the debris came down again an arm and torn hand fell on the shore before their horrified gaze.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"SCATTER!"

"My God!" was the exclamation of Harris, at sight of the human limb that had been torn from the body by the terrible explosion and thrown on the beach.

"It must have been a torpedo that burst under the boat," Sure Shot Seth remarked.

"Without a doubt," said Harris; "and the light we saw floating out from that boat was attached to the deadly machine."

"But from whence did it derive its power of propulsion?"

"That I cannot answer; but I dare say it is some ingenious mechanical contrivance of the inmate of that boat, whoever he may be," answered Seth.

"But who is the inmate of that craft?"

"That's the question," said Seth: "but an idea is creeping into my head, and I'll wager anything that the angel that came and sung and played between the muzzles of your and the savages' guns last night belongs in that little craft."

"Who? Visknia of the Valley?"

"Yes; she's probably some wild, crazy girl, and the act that saved you on the Rock Island was but a freak of her diseased mind. No sane girl would dare wander alone, of her own free will, through those woods at night, much less perform such a reckless act as to come between the guns of two deadly foes as a peacemaker."

"That's mighty sound doctrine, Sure Pop," said old Jim, thoughtfully, "and I'll go a cookskin that if she's aboard that craft, crazy as a loon, her father's thar also, crazier'n a March hare."

"Crazy people sometimes perform miraculous—"

Harris was here cut short by a wild, triumphant peal of laughter ringing across the lake from the raft, fully substantiating and settling in the minds of those who heard, the truth of old Jim's assertion—that the man on the boat was a madman.

By this time nearly every vestige of the terrible explosion had disappeared. The lake had become tranquil, and not a savage was to be seen.

The mysterious boat still occupied its position on the lake, and its occupant his position upon its deck. But soon the latter retired from view, and silent and grim the craft lay upon the placid bosom of the glimmering sheet.

While Seth and his companions stood discussing the tragedy, the sound of footsteps was heard approaching. This enjoined silence upon them; but the footsteps turned and retreated. That they were made by savage feet the Brigade had not a doubt, and that they had not been discovered was also quite evident.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed when the rush of a hundred feet was heard along the shore. A horde of savages were stealing upon the Brigade.

"Whirr-rr rr-rr-rr-r," suddenly rose from the midst of the Brigade, like the "whirr" of a pheasant in a copse—it was the signal to disperse,

Instantly, almost, the whole of the little band scattered in every direction like a flock of sheep. The savages uttered a yell, and sent a volley into the darkness after them, but not a bullet took effect.

Away through the darkness of the grim Black Woods the Brigade fled. Seth took Mr. Harris with him, while Joyful Jim and Tom Grayson, who had been admitted to the membership in the band, sought safety as did the rest.

In ten minutes' time a deep and profound silence reigned over the forest and lake. The red-skins made no attempt to follow the boys far. They knew the danger of scattering in pursuit.

Out in the wood, under the deep shadows of a great tree, Sure Shot Seth and Maggie's father came to a halt, and listened.

"We have escaped," said the latter; "but who knows the fate of the others?"

"Rest assured they are safe," was Seth's confident reply.

"But they are all scattered like a covey of quails. I dare say we are the only two that stuck together."

"That's the idea, exactly. We take the quail for our example. A peculiar 'whirr' of the leader's wings disperses them, and, rest assured, each quail will remain concealed until the leader calls, when it will come out and answer. If all, as applied to the Boy Brigade, do not answer, I repeat the call; and if some are still silent, it is to be taken for granted that danger lurks near the ones not answering."

"But suppose one of your bank should be killed?"

"We have made no provision for such a mishap, for we don't intend to get killed."

"The Boy Brigade is a splendid organization," said Harris, "and if it can find my child, I will be under eternal obligations to it."

"We will leave nothing undone to find her, Mr. Harris. She may have fallen into the red-skins' power, or she may have grown tired waiting my return, and fled. We have only to be patient and constant in our search."

The father sighed heavily.

Half an hour went by in silence.

Not one word nor sound of the others had been heard.

Presently Seth rose to his feet and said:

"I shall now ascertain where the rest of the boys are."

He uttered a clear, startling whistle, not unlike that of a night bird peculiar to the northern woods. The sound drifted away through the night and died in the distance.

The hoot of an owl came back in response.

"Ah!" exclaimed Seth; "the Owl is safe. Did you not hear his answer, Mr. Harris?"

"Was that one of the boys?"

"It was; but listen."

One after the other came the respective answers of each of the Boy Brigade.

"Every one of them is safe," said Seth, "and, in the course of half an hour I will call them up as a hen calleth her brood."

They remained silent for some time, when Seth sent forth the hoot of an owl. It was answered from the north, and a few moments later young Schultz. The Owl, made his appearance. Then followed the howl of the wolf, and Le Subtle Wolf, the Indian lad, appeared. Thus one call after another was made, until the whole band was together, though no two calls were made in the same place, through fear that an enemy might gain the location.

Once more together, a short consultation was held, which developed the fact that the Black Woods were then swarming with Indians. Justin Gray reported that while he was in concealment a number of Indians passed him carrying two canoes in the direction of Lake Luster. As there were a number of small lakes on the outskirts of the Black Woods noted for their inexhaustible supply of fish and fishing-boats, it was very evident that the Indians were not going to be defeated in the capture of the stranger on Lake Luster, and were carrying boats

to the latter point for the purpose of attacking the enemy, despite the recent horrible fate of their companions.

Their persistent efforts to capture the raft were, as our friends well knew, led by the Boy Chief, and the trained mind of Sure Shot Seth quickly concluded that, in this movement of the enemy, there was something or some one aboard that raft which they desired to possess or slay. Might it not be Maggie Harris? Might she not have wandered from where he had left her to the lake, and been taken aboard the madman's raft?

The stunning report of a rifle, coming from the direction of the lake, put an end to his cogitations.

CHAPTER XIX.

A GAME WELL PLAYED.

SURE SHOT SETH made known his convictions, and at his suggestion the party returned to the lake.

The shadows, by this time were lengthening on the western side of the little sheet; but they had not reached the raft, which still sat motionless on the water, and to all appearances tenantless.

Hooseah, the Indian lad, was at once sent out to reconnoiter the western shore, while Seth went himself to scout along the eastern side of the lake. It was their desire to know what the Indians were about, and their exact location, as well as their numerical strength.

Seth kept back about two rods from the margin of the lake and moved rapidly, yet noiselessly as a phantom. He at length found himself at the water's very edge in a clump of bushes on the northern end of the lake. Before him was a narrow opening or path, beyond which was another border of dense shrubbery. He was just about to step across this path when he heard light footsteps coming along toward the lake. Remaining quiet, he awaited their approach. A young chief, dressed in all the gaudy panoply of war, brushed past him and stopped on the margin of the lake.

It was Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, Ivan Le Clercq!

Seth could scarcely restrain the terrible emotion that ran in his breast on making this discovery. His hand mechanically sought the weapon at his girdle; but his better judgment prevailed, and he remained as silent as if frozen to the spot, his eyes fixed upon the young chief.

The young renegade ran his eyes over the lake. Seth was so close to him that he could see a strange smile of delight pass over his countenance at sight of something on the water. What it was that pleased him Seth knew not, nor dare he even move his head to ascertain.

The chief kept his eyes out upon the lake until his attention was diverted by footsteps behind. He turned and saw a young warrior approaching.

"What does Hawk-Eyes see?" asked the latter.

"Sh!" cautioned the chief; "look yonder."

The warrior did as directed, when a low, sinister smile of triumph shot athwart his dusky, painted face.

The next moment a succession of tiny waves began chasing the shore at their feet and the dip of a paddle became audible. The chief and his companion stepped back into the shadows. This movement left Seth under less restraint.

"Ah!" the cunning, cowardly wretches," thought Seth, drawing his revolver, "they are preparing to pounce upon some unsuspecting victim. But I'll see about it."

The next moment a small canoe with a single occupant touched the bank where the path ended, and that occupant was a female—a young and lovely girl—the fairy-like Vishnia, the maid of the Valley.

As she rose to her feet the chief advanced and confronted her. She started with a little cry of alarm, but soon recovered her composure and addressed the Indian.

"Whom have I the pleasure of meeting?"

"Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief," answered the young renegade.

"Does he lead the Indians that surround Lake Luster?"

"He does," was the answer.

"Then with him I came to negotiate terms of peace."

She stood erect in her rubber canoe as she spoke. The tones of her voice were soft and child-like in their melody. Through the foliage that concealed his person, Sure Shot Seth could see the symmetry of her profile clearly outlined against the moonlit water. A thin shawl enveloped her slender figure. A light straw hat was pushed back from her head till it rested on her back, thus revealing wondrous features.

"What does the white maiden want with the Boy Chief?" the young renegade asked, his tone and looks devoid of the first principles of courtesy.

"To effect terms of peace."

"Well, let me hear what propositions for peace you have to make," the renegade observed.

"Nothing more than the request that you withdraw your designs against our home yonder, on the lake, and no harm shall befall a red-man, so far as we are concerned," was the maiden's response.

"We fear nothing, nor any one," was the brutal reply of the Boy Chief. "The woods and the lakes belong to the red-man, and it is not for the whites to make conditions regarding them."

"I know the Indians are not cowards, and I do not wish to intimidate them. I only ask what is honorable."

"What is your father's name?"

"Neptune," she answered; but Le Clercq's ignorance of mythology concealed the evasion in her answer.

"Neptune," he repeated; "well, I will accede to your demands on one condition."

"I will be pleased to hear what your wish may be."

"Well, there's a young girl aboard your boat, isn't there?"

Vishnia started, and hesitated for a moment to reply; but finally she said:

"I have no desire to answer falsely; there is a young girl there—Miss Harris."

Seth's heart gave a great bound. He was afraid that it would betray his presence. Maggie was safe, and that was joy to him. He felt so thankful that he could have kissed the garments of her who brought the glad intelligence. But his feelings assumed a different mood when he heard the young chief say:

"Deliver that maiden into my power and you and yours shall be molested no more by the Indians."

"I would not consent to do a wrong, for if you would hold her a captive against her will, it would be cruel and barbarous," said the maiden.

"The Indians are classed as barbarians," Le Clercq replied; "so it wouldn't make any material difference."

"Father will never consent to give her up to her enemies."

"But I will make him give her up."

"Do not overestimate your power, young chief."

"I'll see to that. I'll just hold you in hostage till that girl is given up."

Vishnia started, and her face grew pale with fear. This was something she had not expected, and she saw little chance of escape from her situation.

"I have always heard that the Indians were possessed of gallantry, and under such circumstances would treat a woman kindly," said Vishnia; "but had I known otherwise, I would never have placed myself at your mercy."

"I am sorry to disappoint you; but the exigency of this case demands that I hold you a prisoner till Maggie Harris is given up. Black Dog"—turning to the Indian—"you will take the pale-face girl to our camp."

Half-reluctantly, the Indian advanced toward the

maiden, who, seating herself, attempted to flee. But the Indian was too quick for her. He caught her canoe and dragged it half upon the shore; but, before he had time to contaminate her by his touch, Sure Shot Seth saw the bushes on the opposite side of the path move, and the next instant a tomahawk, wielded by some unseen person there, fell upon the head of the savage. Like a log, he went down lifeless, falling partly in the water. Hawk-Eyes started back, aghast with fear and horror. He heard the click of a revolver on his left, and the next moment the weapon itself was thrust through the foliage into his very face. But not a word was spoken—not a face was visible to the half-terrified young chief. He fixed his glaring eyes upon the weapon, and ran them along the arm thrust from the bushes; but he could not tell by whom he was confronted.

For fully a minute the young chief stood wincing before the weapon thrust at him like the finger of death; but, seeing the unknown enemy hesitated to fire, he gathered courage, struck up the muzzle of the weapon, then turned and darted into the darkness.

Then Seth parted the bushes, and stepped out into the moonlight on one side of the path, and Hooseah, the Indian lad, appeared from the other.

"Me kill Sioux brave; why Sure Shot no kill Hawk-Eyes?" asked the young friendly, a look of sore regret on his face.

"I would not fire through fear of bringing danger upon her," replied Seth, pointing toward the little canoe leaping across the water under the vigorous strokes of the fair Vishnia's paddle.

CHAPTER XX.

CLOSE QUARTERS INDEED.

VISHNIA waited not to learn who her rescuers were, but wild with fear, she pushed off from the beach and sped toward the stronghold of her father upon the lake. But, after she had had a few moments for thought, and her mind had become somewhat composed, she felt a pang of regret for having acted so hastily in leaving her unknown friends without a word of thanks, after they had saved her. To remedy this, however, was now too late; and she was to remain in ignorance, for the time being, as to the persons who had befriended her.

Seth and Hooseah felt in no way aggrieved by the course she had pursued. In fact, it was just what they wanted, for no sooner was Hawk-Eyes free than he gave the alarm that brought a horde of the savages yelling to the water's edge. But, all they found was a comrade lying dead, his head cloven by a tomahawk.

The two scouts at once beat a hasty retreat along the shore back toward their friends, whom they found in a fever of excitement and anxiety. Seth lost no time in communicating to Harris the discovery he had made respecting Maggie.

"Good Lord bless you, boy!" the happy father exclaimed, wringing Seth's hand. "It relieves my heart of an awful load to know that my child lives; but now, another fear rises in my mind—the fear that the madman on that craft may do her violence."

"Rest easy on that point, Mr. Harris," said Seth, "for I assure you no harm can befall her there; for she has for a companion as fair and lovely a girl as the sun ever shone upon. I heard her refuse to give Maggie to the savages to insure her own and her father's safety. No; Maggie is safe; but the mystery surrounding that raft has deeply enlisted my interest."

"Then you don't think the folks on that consarn are crazy, do you, now?" asked Joyful Jim.

"Far from it; for if the rest are to be judged by that maiden whom Hooseah tells me is Vishnia, the Maid of the Valley—she who rescued you at Rock Island, then they are superior beings. By keeping in the vicinity of the lake we may be enabled to un-

ravel this mystery. It is true, our assistance may be needed at the Agency; but if by remaining here we can hold a score or two of Indians away from there, we will be rendering them a great service; so suppose we now seek some safe quarters and rest easy till morning?"

"'Nuff said," exclaimed old Jim, "for I'm 'bout bumfusticated."

All readily acquiesced in Seth's suggestion, when the party at once moved a mile southward and bivouacked on the margin of the Black Woods. Here they passed the night, and with the first streaks of dawn they were astir. Hooseah brained a deer with his tomahawk, shortly after daylight, which furnished a hearty breakfast and an ample supply of food for the needs of the day.

Regaled by their brief sleep, and their meal of savory venison, the Boy Brigade felt vigorous, and anxious for the day's excitement to begin.

Hooseah and young Tricks being deployed as scouts, the party started back toward the lake. They had proceeded but a short distance when firing was heard in advance, and the peculiar war-cry of Le Subtile Wolf warned the Brigade that danger was very near.

In a moment every man and boy sought shelter, and the dozen red-skins in pursuit of Hooseah found themselves in an ambuscade of deadly enemies ere they were aware. A short, but desperate conflict ensued. The red-skins were routed, and but for the dense shadows of the Black Woods, not a man of them would have escaped.

Fierce and terrible the war-cry of the Boy Brigade was hurled after the foe, and wild and demoniacal came the response from the enemy.

The Brigade pressed on toward the lake, and at length came in sight of it. The first thing that met their view was the floating cabin of old Neptune. Smoke was curling from one of the little chimney-like boxes on the roof. The door opened, and all saw a little female figure, with a vessel in her hand, trip out upon the porch or platform in front, and dip some water from the lake, then re-enter the building.

"That was the fair Vishnia," said Seth.

"Doin' up the housework," added Joyful Jim, with a strange smile.

"And yonder," said Mr. Harris, "you can see a horde of Indians preparing to embark in canoes from the east shore; and, I dare say, they have designs upon the palace of old Neptune. Boys, can't we drive them away?"

"Neptune will defend himself, I'll guarantee," said Justin Gray. "I'll venture the assertion that he's surrounded with torpedoes."

Gaining a point where they could command a full view of the savages, the boys watched the operations with no little interest. And it was soon discovered that, in addition to the four canoes which they had brought to Lake Luster during the night, a huge raft of logs was in course of construction. No less than a dozen logs were in the water already, lying at right-angles with the shore and about three feet apart. Across the ends of these, a long pine stick of timber was placed and firmly lashed to each cross-piece. Another log, but smaller in size, was lashed across the other ends of the under logs, and then the raft seemed to have been completed. Between every two logs, two savages took their position, their bodies submerged in the water and their heads and shoulders concealed behind the large log lashed across the ends of the others.

It was rather a rude, yet effectual raft for the purpose intended, and our friends watched the preparations for the attack upon Neptune with no little fear and doubt.

"If they succeeded in getting within easy gunshot of Neptune's raft, I am afraid they will be successful in their attempts," said Sure Shot. "However, we will walk around that way and perhaps we'll get an opportunity to take the red rascals in the rear."

"Ah, there goes the raft!" exclaimed young Gray.

True enough, the savages remaining on shore had pushed the raft away from the bank, and slowly and heavily the cumbersome affair drifted out, propelled by the feet of those in the water.

"Now, boys," said Seth, "let us hurry around there and do our best for our friends on the lake."

Away they glided like so many shadows and soon came within range of the Indians watching upon the bank. Without a moment's delay they opened a deadly fire upon them. The savages at once sought shelter; but in such a position as to cover the operations of their friends on the lake.

Harris kept by the side of the fearless young borderman, Sure Shot Seth, and it was with a feeling of the deepest agony that he learned of their inability to prevent the advance of the raft upon the structure that sheltered his child.

The Boy Brigade was now in its element again. Concealed behind trees, logs and bushes, the fearless youths watched with eager, burning eyes for a glimpse of the enemy. They fought the Indians as Indians fight; and as the red-skins were laboring under the excitement of a surprise, they appeared restless and impatient, and kept dodging hither and thither like rats, exposing themselves to view; and whenever the clear report of a rifle, fired by one of the boys, stung through the morning air, a death-yell was sure to follow.

Sure Shot and Harris were where they could command a view of both the Indians' raft and the floating cabin of old Neptune. They saw the latter come out on the porch or platform of his domicile, stoop over and place something in the water, as on the previous night.

"Now look out!" exclaimed Seth; "it's my opinion you'll hear something 'drop.' That man has sent another of his infernal machines to intercept them savages."

About this time a canoe containing a number of warriors put out from the northern shore; but they approached the raft in a rather cautious manner, their eyes searching every foot of the crystal depths before them.

Seth and Harris watched the raft closely for some minutes. Slowly and heavily it crept on through the water.

At times it seemed to stand still, and the patience of the watchers became sorely pressed; but at length they saw the log that protected the savages shoot suddenly into the air, followed by a perfect mountain of water. Then athwart the morning burst an awful, pent-up roar that fairly shook the earth. A perfect maelstrom appeared to engulf raft and savages. The waters of Lake Luster endeavored to leap from their bed, but fell back with a thunderous surge. Wave after wave rolled with a sullen crash against the shore, and recoiled with a rushing, seething roar. Both savages and raft were lost in the rush of waters; but when the water began to calm down, several of the dusky wretches were seen buffeting the waves in desperate attempts to reach the shore.

Old Neptune stood in front of his floating cabin and regarded the whole with remarkable indifference; and as soon as the savages had all disappeared, two female figures issued from the cabin and stood by his side.

An exclamation of joy burst from the lips of Mr. Harris for he saw that one of them was his own lost child, Maggie. Seth's heart, too, gave a great bound, but he kept back the words of joy and love that rose to his lips.

For a moment the father and lover watched the figures on the cabin porch, but suddenly the crash of rifles drew their attention aside, and when they looked out upon the lake again, the three forms had disappeared inside their defense.

But the savages seemed determined in their efforts to capture the cabin of the old hermit of the lake.

Dashing the logs that had been washed ashore to-

gether again, another party of Indians took their position upon the raft and pushed out. This time with more success, for not long after they came alongside the cabin.

The savages, stripped of every garment save their loin-cloths, climbed and wriggled up the steep, smooth inclination of the cabin, like huge maggots.

Puffs of smoke burst from the side of the cabin, followed by stunning reports.

Suddenly a wild cry of horror burst from every lip, and the savages sprung away from the cabin as if stung by scorpions.

Our three friends saw the cabin of old Neptune reel upon the water like a drunken thing, then to their amazement and horror saw it sink beneath the waves of Lake Luster with its helpless, imprisoned inmates!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FACE BENEATH THE WATERS.

A GROAN burst from the lips of Sure Shot Seth and old Jim, while a wail of the most heart-rending agony escaped the lips of the settler, Mr. Harris, when they saw the cabin that contained their friends go down in the lake.

"Oh, my poor child! my poor child!" cried the bereaved father, starting up as if to leap in the water.

"May Heaven smite their destroyers with its most terrible vengeance!" moaned Seth, sick at heart.

"Can't we help them?" cried Harris; "can we not—"

"No, Harris," said old Jim, "we can do 'em no good."

Under cover of a clump of trees the Boy Brigade held a council, their hearts overshadowed by the disaster on the lake.

"Why stay here now," said Justin Gray, "since we can be of no avail to the inmates of the floating cabin?"

"We owe the dead as well as the livin' a duty," said old Jim, thoughtfully, yet with a strange smile upon his face.

"Yes, it is a duty—a Christian duty we owe the dead to give them a Christian burial," declared Sure Shot Seth.

Mr. Harris bowed his head and wept, too full of grief for utterance.

And so it was decided that they remain by the lake until the bodies could be rescued from their confinement, and interred.

To remain inactive, however, was a persecution in itself to the little band of bordermen; and as the hours wore heavily on, propositions for some movement were presented by various persons. All were decided in the negative until Seth announced an adventure that would admit of no discussion; he proposed to go himself upon the lake, and examine the situation of the sunken cabin, leaving his friends ashore to cover his movements, should the savages make any demonstration against him.

No one could see any material danger in this, and so the young rifleman at once embarked in the canoe, still in their possession, for the scene of death. He used the paddle with remarkable skill, and sent the craft flying over the water. He was guided toward the right spot by the four square chimney-tops protruding above the water. The surface of the lake was smooth and tranquil, and shone like polished silver under the oblique rays of the declining sun.

He soon came within five feet of the chimneys, when he ceased paddling and permitted his boat to come to a rest. He gazed over the side of his craft into the water. Its liquid depths were clear as crystal. He could see the bottom of the lake, and the lower edge of the sunken cabin. He turned and looked over the other side of his boat. He started back with a cry of horror. Beneath him lay the cabin. There was a small glass window or skylight in the roof, and at this window, her hands clutched

hold of the lower sill, her white, ghastly face uplifted with all the expression of terror that death could stamp thereon, he beheld Maggie Harris, standing erect, rigid and motionless.

"Oh, Heaven!" burst from the youth's lips, as he beheld the face of his dead darling at the window of the sunken cabin. He turned his eyes away, unable to look upon the ghastly scene. But he could not drive from his mind the ghastly face, the eyes that were staring wide open, the flowing locks of hair, and the look of despair that he had seen at the window.

For a moment or two he sat motionless, paralyzed. A shrill, quavering whistle rung upon his ear. He started—he recognized it as the warning of danger that belonged to the Boy Brigade's code of signals. He glanced around him, and, to his surprise and fear, beheld three canoes, loaded with savages, put out from different points around the lake and move rapidly toward him. Taking up his paddle he headed toward his friends, while two of the canoes bent their course to cut him off from shore. This, Seth knew, they would almost accomplish, considering their advantages, were it not for his friends, who would leave nothing undone to cover his retreat. But scarcely had he considered this self-assuring fact ere the report of firearms, mingled with yells and shouts, came from the direction in which he was going, telling him that the enemy had attacked the Brigade, and that he could look for no succor from that quarter.

What had promised a quiet, uninterrupted visit to the grave of his sweetheart, now threatened to be a dangerous adventure. He knew by the rapid firing, and the fierce, savage yells in the woods, that his friends were being sorely pressed; and, as he had to depend wholly upon his own exertions for safety, he turned his boat and attempted to escape between the canoe to the south and that to the east of him. The elastic blade in his hands bent like a bow; the canoe fairly leaped under each powerful stroke, and a white, frothy streak across the lake defined the wake of the boat.

For awhile, strong hope of escape encouraged the young rifleman in his almost superhuman efforts; but in an instant all was dashed to the earth, the paddle fell from his hands, and he sunk half-lifeless in the canoe, a stream of hot blood spurting from his nostrils. Nature had been overdone. An artery had been ruptured, and what of life the hemorrhage left was now in possession of his implacable foe, Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief.

Weak and still bleeding, Sure Shot was taken by the savages and conveyed ashore, and out into the woods into the midst of a large band of young warriors.

A yell of triumph hailed the captors' arrival, and a general rush to see the captive followed.

Seth was permitted to sit down, and holding his extended arms above his head succeeded in stopping the flow of blood from his nose. He was literally covered with his own crimson life-tide.

The savages respected his misfortune so far as an Indian can respect a wounded enemy. No indignities were visited upon him; but many, fierce and vindictive, were their threats.

Seth ran his eyes over the faces of his captors for that of the Boy Chief: but it was nowhere to be seen. Presently, however, that young renegade made his appearance with a number of others from around the lake. As he pressed through the crowd of savages surrounding Seth, a cry of abject fear burst from his lips when he caught sight of the prisoner. He started back, at first, as if from the presence of one he feared, but quickly recovering and concealing all trepidation from his braves, he advanced to where our hero sat.

"Sure Shot Seth," he said, half to himself.

Seth raised his eyes, while a cry of surprise burst from the red-skin's lips.

"Who are you that knows me?" demanded Seth, "and speaks English so well?"

"We met last on the morning of the shooting-match at the Agency," was the chief's response.

Seth knew it, but pretended ignorance.

"I have no recollection of you," he answered.

"Well, you will know me when you see me again, I assure you."

"Ah, that's a threat," Seth replied with disdain.

"None but a coward would mock and threaten a prisoner."

"You are my prisoner—you, the leader of a band under whose rifle scores of my braves have fallen," returned the chief.

"It has been a fair, free fight. You have the odds, and if you get whipped, you have no reason to complain," returned the fearless boy rifleman.

"Then if you get scalped and roasted, I suppose you'll have no reason to complain?"

"Of nothing more than that it was done at the instance of a cowardly knave—a whitered skin, whose name is Ivan Le Clercq," said Seth, contemptuously, "and who, with Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot, will go down to posterity in history base hound and traitor."

"But the historian will never know the fate of Sure Shot Seth, he who played it well the day of the shooting-match; but I wasn't asleep."

"Coward! you believed me dead till you met me here, a minute ago; and fearing the vengeance of the law, you fled—deserted your own people and endeavored to coax your four white friends away with you; and for all I know succeeded, after having sneakily murdered Abe Thorne. You are a vile wretch—too vile even for an Indian."

The Boy Chief started as if thunderstruck at these words; but he saw that his manifestations of fear brought looks of derision and disgust to the faces of his followers, and so he rallied his spirit of bravado, and replied:

"Sure Shot Seth, you know too much to live."

"And you too little to die."

"And, therefore," the chief continued, "I shall see that you do not escape this time. Nor your band either."

He turned aside and held a short, inaudible consultation with his braves. When the pow-wow had ended, Hawk-Eyes took the majority of his warriors and left, going toward the lake. Seth felt sure that the Boy Brigade was the objective point of this movement.

Those left in charge of the prisoner finally took him and moved away toward the lake also. On reaching the water they embarked in a canoe for the interior of the lake. Two other savages in a canoe, that was sunk to its gunwales under a load of stones, followed behind. A third canoe with three occupants, towing behind, a huge log by means of a rope made of fibrous bark, followed the second.

When about one hundred yards from the sunken cabin of Neptune, the canoe of the prisoner stopped. The second ran alongside of it, though leaving a few feet of space between into which the third party towed the logs.

Something of the truth now entered Seth's mind, and sent a shudder through his veins. He believed he was to be lashed to the log and left to die, where his friends, as well as his enemies, could witness his agonies, and yet render him no assistance. Nor was he left in a moment's doubt. The red skins lifted him from the canoe and laid him back down upon the log. He was then bound with strips of tough, fibrous bark as securely as though he was a part of the log itself. His hands were doubled under the log and bound so that he could not move a muscle.

A long rope of bark was next attached to the log and the canoe loaded with rock. Then the bottom of the canoe was cut through in several places; the craft filled with water and sunk to the bottom of the lake, securely anchoring the log in the center of the little sheet.

Having completed their fiendish work, the savages retired to the woods to await the result.

Seth at once saw through the whole of this devilish

work; they had set a trap for the rest of the Brigade. Exposed as he was, the red-skins knew full well that his friends would discover his situation and endeavor to relieve him, when they—the savages—would pounce down upon them from their coverts along the shore like hawks upon a brood.

Seth's hands and feet were in the water, and as a strong breeze now disturbed the surface of the lake, tiny waves dashed against the log and sprinkled their spray over him. He could not turn his head; he could not move a muscle; nor could he breathe with half his usual freedom. He could see nothing but the sky, from which the light of day was fast fading, for by this time the sun had gone down.

As the twilight shadows deepened around him, he summoned all his strength and sent forth the Brigade's signal of distress. It was answered from the northern shore; but the answer was immediately followed by the report of a rifle—evidence that the savages were in close proximity to the Brigade.

Darkness at length fell. The sky was overcast with swift-moving clouds. The wind swept across the Black Woods and tossed the surface of the lake into tiny billows. Seth was soon drenched to the skin and chilled to the marrow. An inevitable death stared him in the face. Wave after wave broke over him. A thousand vague and awful horrors crowded upon his soul. Strange visions rose up before him and hovered like spirits around. Strange, icy arms were clasped around him like hoops of steel. Then followed an awful roaring and the sensation of being swept away into the illimitable depths of eternity. Down, down, deeper and deeper into the unknown void he felt himself sinking—that buzzing roar gradually dissolving into the notes of far-off music, sweet and plaintive, and finally falling into that oblivion which knows no pain, no suffering—the hand-maid of Death.

CHAPTER XXII.

LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD.

How long he had remained unconscious Sure Shot Seth had no means of telling; but when reason began to assert its power, it was with a vague uncertainty that he regarded the state of existence. He found that he was not in the water nor upon the log, of which he maintained an indistinct recollection; but upon a soft pallet surrounded by walls, and shadowy forms that were passing around him. The murmur of voices in the distance also assured him of the vague, dreamy existence in some sphere or other; but his mind was so heavy and depressed that he could not collect his thoughts. Little by little, however, objects around him began to assume more tangible and material shape. Out of the shadows of unconsciousness those moving figures gradually unfolded themselves until he found that he was surrounded by men and women. At length he had so far recovered as to recognize a face bending over him. It was that of Vishnia, the Maid of the Valley. At one side sat her father, old Neptune. With their presence was connected some vague horror. He closed his eyes and tried to recall the past. One by one the events of the last few days came trooping back; and when at length a remembrance of the sinking of old Neptune's cabin, with all on board, entered his mind, a cry burst from his lips. They lived as he did himself; but was it not in another sphere? They had surely been drowned in Lake Luster and passed into another existence. He had met with a similar fate on the log where the savages had left him. This explanation seemed cogent enough to him; but as another thought flashed into his mind, he started up, crying out:

"Where is she? Maggie?"

"Here," responded a soft voice, and Maggie Harris appeared before him, her face radiant with love and joy.

"Then we are all here," he said, sinking back upon his couch, a great load seeming to have been removed from his brain.

"Yes, Seth, we are all safe in the cabin of Neptune," answered Maggie.

"But have we all not undergone a change? we are not on earth, are we?" the half-delirious youth asked; "you were all drowned when the cabin sunk, were you not?"

"No, Seth," answered Maggie, "we were not drowned. This is a wonderful structure. Neptune sunk it at his pleasure to save us from the savages.

Every opening can be hermetically sealed, so that no water can enter the rooms. It was Neptune that rescued you and brought you here. You have long been unconscious."

Her words swept away the cloud that hovered over the youth's mind; and in a moment he was in full possession of his senses. He opened his eyes and gazed around him. He saw that the room was nicely furnished. The walls, which gradually sloped from the floor to the apex overhead, were heavily painted and varnished. A small sheet-iron stove occupied one end of the long room. In one corner were cooking utensils and dishes. Further down the room was a table covered with books. In the other end was a sort of a stand or work-bench, upon which lay an almost countless number of tools. A machine—apparently unfinished—of some kind or other, and composed of innumerable cogs, wheels and pulleys, stood upon the table.

Under the table were five rubber canoes, four large, one small.

Near the center of the room was something that puzzled our hero. It was a huge box with a crank on one side and a fly-wheel on the other. But what could it be used for? At first he concluded that it was some apparatus for propelling the floating cabin if such the domicile might be termed; but, further investigation revealed a long rubber hose lying coiled at the foot of the machine, and which led to the supposition that it was used for manipulating the craft.

Three windows, of but a single large pane each, lighted the room, while overhead were four openings, one of which served as a chimney, the others as ventilators.

Altogether it was a strange structure; but in perfect keeping with the wild, mysterious air that surrounded its owner, old Neptune, and his fair and lovely daughter, Vishnia.

There was nothing to fear in the old man's looks; on the contrary there was a majesty in his tall form, his intellectual face and patriarchal beard, that commanded respect and admiration.

He came and sat down by Seth, administered stimulants to him, and at the same time kept up an easy, pleasant conversation. The former strengthened his body, the latter his mind; and in the course of a few hours the youth was on his feet. Neptune conducted him to the door and out upon the porch, from whence he had a fair view of Lake Luster and the surrounding shores. He searched the latter for some signs of his friends, but saw nothing. The beach seemed entirely deserted.

"I wonder if my friends are alive?" he said to the old man.

"They were at ten o'clock last night," replied Neptune, "and I think they had a conflict with the savages this morning, for I heard a sharp firing over on the west shore."

"The savages seem determined on the destruction of the Boy Brigade," said Seth, seriously.

"Yes, and the floating-palace of old Neptune."

"But you can outwit them when we cannot."

The old man burst into a peal of laughter.

Seth continued:

"Your residence here is a wonderful structure. Its mechanism surpasses my comprehension."

"No doubt of it, my boy. But if you will come with me inside, I will explain the whole thing to you in a satisfactory manner."

As they turned to go in, Seth caught sight of a savage standing on the eastern shore, and by his dress recognized him as Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief.

When Seth and Neptune entered the cabin Vishnia was playing upon the harp from which she had called forth such ravishing strains a few nights previous on Rock Island. The old man motioned Seth to a seat, then sat down himself, and burying his face in his hands remained silent until his daughter had ceased playing. Then, raising his head and nervously running his fingers through his gray locks, he took a book from the shelf near at hand, and turning to Seth read in a clear voice, as follows:

"PRINCIPLES OF FLOTATION.—When a body is plunged into a liquid, it is urged downward by its proper weight, and upward by the buoyant effort of the liquid. If the density of the immersed body is the same as that of the liquid, its weight will be equal to the buoyant effort of the liquid, and it will remain in equilibrium wherever it may be placed. If the density of the body is greater than that of the liquid, its weight will be greater than the buoyant effort, and the body will sink to the bottom. If the density of the body is less than that of the liquid its weight will be less than the buoyant effort, and the body will rise to the surface. The body will continue to rise until the weight of the displaced liquid equals that of the body, when it will come to a rest."

"Now," said the old man, closing the book, "these are the philosophical principles upon which my craft here is constructed. I have always been a firm believer in the ability of talent and genius to construct a submarine house and boat in which people may live and travel under water as well as on the surface of the earth and water. The former I have demonstrated to my satisfaction. In the first place, I had a reservoir constructed thirty feet long, twelve feet wide, and twelve inches deep. Its capacity, therefore, is three hundred and sixty cubic feet. It was made air-tight, and provided with a stop-cock and faucets, and loaded with stones until its density was almost equal to that of the water. Then on top of this reservoir this cabin was erected, and the additional weight caused the reservoir to sink still deeper so that a part of the cabin is submerged. You can see that the threshold of the door is two feet above the floor, which brings the line of flotation nearly the same height above the floor, so that a portion of the cabin is always under water. The cabin, as you saw, was covered with galvanized sheet-iron, all soldered together, and the door and windows made to close hermetically. As the amount of water displaced by the air-chamber, below, is equal to the weight of the submerged part of the cabin, all I have to do, to sink the whole concern is to open a faucet and let the reservoir fill with water, when down we go. The shape of the roof aids the downward pressure. While thus submerged, we receive fresh air through those pipes overhead that project above the surface of the water."

"But suppose you should sink beyond your depth, then those pipes would flood the interior," said Seth.

"That is an obstacle that I propose to overcome soon," continued the old man, thoughtfully. "I propose to invent an apparatus by which a supply of fresh air can be had at pleasure, even when fathoms below the surface. But, when I wish to rise to the surface, I force the water from the reservoir below by means of this force-pump; and the buoyant effort carries me to the surface. This much have I demonstrated in living under the water. As to traveling under the water, I am a firm believer in its accomplishment; and have already invented a little machine that travels, by means of a screw worked by a series of clock-works just underneath the surface of the water. As soon as I had accomplished this, the idea of a self-moving torpedo was suggested to my mind; and as rumors of a war were abroad in the land, I thought it a good time to invent something of the kind, and so I went to work, and how well I succeeded, you have doubtless seen illustrated within the past few days."

"I have seen a savage canoe and raft blown out of the water within the past day or two if that is what you have reference to," answered Seth.

"It is; and if I had possessed more than the two torpedoes, no savage canoe would ever have reached my cabin. Since the last attack, however, I have completed another, ready for some desperate emergency, for which I am hourly looking."

"But I don't see how you can send your torpedoes so direct as to intercept the craft of the enemy every time," said Seth.

"Well, it requires care. The instrument being shaped somewhat like a fish, has, what I call 'sights,' on each end, by means of which I get it set on a line directly with the object I wish it to strike. The principal machinery is submerged, and to prevent it sinking, a buoy is attached to it which floats on the water's surface. If the water is smooth and there are no cross waves, or other objects to interfere, the machine will glide away in a line straight as a bullet could travel. When the canoe is reached, an upright wire that protrudes just above the water, strikes the boat, and having connection with the inside machinery, fires a pistol which in turn fires the magazine, and the explosion follows. So far, I have tested it only on a small scale; but propose to apply the same motor to a magazine sufficient to blow a ship-of-war out of existence."

"I dare say you will succeed; but I am surprised at your coming here, into this wild, savage country to pursue your experiments," said Seth.

"Tis the seclusion, the seclusion, my son, that I sought out here," the old man said, glancing vaguely out across the lake.

"Neptune, then, is not your name?" observed Seth.

"Not at all," was the laconic reply of the old man.

Seth relapsed into silence; he saw that the old man had communicated all that he seemed desirous of doing, and, finally, he rose and going to where Maggie and Vishnia were seated said:

"Maggie, your father and friends mourned you as dead yesterday when they saw this craft sink beneath the waves."

"Poor papa!" said Maggie, sadly, "I know he must have suffered," and the tears welled up into her eyes.

"Yes; and had you been lost I would have considered myself, in a measure, the cause; for I should not have left you the other day when I did."

"You did only what you supposed to be for the best, Seth," she said, gently.

"Friend March," called out old Neptune, who was standing at the open door, "will you come this way a moment? I want your opinion on a little matter."

"Yes, sir," answered Seth, and he walked down to the old man.

"What do you think of the prospect for a battle?" the latter asked, pointing out upon the lake where three canoes, filled with savages, were approaching.

"Too promising," answered Seth; "but if you will provide me with a rifle I assure you they'll not reach here alive, if I know myself."

"That you can have, Seth," replied old Neptune, and turning aside he took a rifle from the wall and handed it to the youth; "I have heard that you are called Sure Shot on account of your marksmanship; so now I want to see your skill demonstrated."

They went out upon the platform. Seth looked the rifle carefully over, balanced it upon his hand, tried the trigger and peeped through the sights. Then with a satisfied air he drew the hammer back, raised the piece, and, taking deliberate aim at the nearest savage, fired. A yell followed the report; and the next moment not a savage was to be seen. They had elevated over the prow of each canoe, a sort of a breastwork made of slabs thick enough to resist bullets. Three or four of these had been made fast to cross-pieces, and being about five feet long and four wide, completely covered the inmates of each boat.

No sooner did Neptune discover this than his face assumed a look of serious gravity. He shook his head in a doubtful manner, and then turning to Seth said:

"I am afraid we will be unable to repel that force."

"They are well covered from bullets, friend Neptune," answered Seth, "and seem determined on the capture of your craft. However, we can prepare to give them a reception."

"Let them come," said the old man; "if they get the boat they'll have to dive for it."

"Then you propose to sink?"

"Come in; I want you to realize the marvels of Nature under the waves," answered the old artisan.

Seth turned and followed him into the cabin.

The door was closed and barred, and panels were placed over each window, shutting out the light.

"The Indians are coming again, children," the old man said to the two girls, "and we have got to go down."

Vishnia was unmoved by the news; but Maggie grew a shade pale, and her eyes having sought those of Seth, she involuntarily drew nearer to him through fear and the yearnings of her heart. Neptune walked to one end of the room, and seizing a post that protruded through the floor, pulled it upward a few inches.

Instantly, almost, Seth felt a tremor pass through the cabin, followed by the rush and roar of water under them. There was a downward motion of the building; a cloud seemed to pass over the windows, and the cabin came to rest on the lake's bottom.

With a feeling akin to awe, Sure Shot Seth glanced around as if expecting to see the sides of the structure give way under the pressure upon it. But in a moment all became settled, and stepping under one of the holes in the roof he glanced through it. He saw the blue sky, and heard the surge of the waves above him.

"What do you think of my submarine hut, Seth?" the old man asked, his face beaming satisfaction.

"So far it is a success," answered our hero; "but if the enemy finds out the use of those pipes, it would be an easy matter to flood us in here."

"But I don't want them to find it out," replied Neptune.

"But how are you going to prevent it?"

"I cannot prevent it; but should one of them dare to look down one of the chimneys, he will be shot while in the act."

At this juncture a shadow appeared over the window where the young folks stood.

A little cry burst from Maggie's lips, and she shrunk closer to Seth, grasping his arm as if to prevent falling.

"What is it, Maggie?" asked Seth.

"Look!" she answered.

Seth did as directed, and, to his surprise and horror, beheld a canoe resting upon the surface of the lake, nearly over them; while in the craft he could distinctly see four savages, all of whom were gazing down through the clear water at the little window—into his very face!

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEPTUNE NEPTUNE NO MORE!

SETH started back in alarm, calling the attention of Neptune to the proximity of the enemy.

The old man evinced some uneasiness, and advancing to the pane, looked out. The foe were still there, the canoe appearing to rest in the air above, so clear and transparent was the water.

Neptune stood and watched them for a moment, then turned away. Seth noticed that a look of uneasiness was upon his face; and when he saw the old man take a brace of revolvers from a box on his work-bench and examine their priming, he felt satisfied that the cabin was in danger.

"The red scavengers of the forest may give us trouble, my young friends," he said. "They have doubtless discovered the nature of our boat, and may tamper with those air-pipes, three of which are open. But in order that their curiosity, should it lead them to look through one of the openings, may

be fully satisfied, I want each tube guarded, and the moment a red-skin's face appears above it, a bullet put through his savage brain. Here is a revolver; watch that tube."

Seth took the weapon, and scarcely had he taken his position under the pipe ere a dark object appeared at the upper end, and in a moment all light was excluded therefrom. Believing it to be a red-skin's face, he raised his revolver and fired. A groan of agony, followed by the dripping of something warm upon his hands, and the appearance of daylight at the top of the tube, told the youth that his aim had been fatal.

The dip of paddles, the sound of excited voices, and the plash of the water above, told of the excitement that prevailed among the red-skins.

For some time the little band was kept in dire suspense by the foe. What their next movement would be, they could not conjecture. They entertained hopes of the red-skins withdrawing; but as the moments passed, and their presence continued above, these hopes were dispelled by the sound of a blow like that of an ax, which sent a tremor through the whole building and a chill to the hearts of its inmates.

The meaning was obvious enough—the enemy had attacked the pipes with their hatchets.

A cry of terror burst from Vishnia's lips, while, with a look of awful resolve on her father's face, he sprang to the pump in the center of the room. With all the power of a Hercules, he applied himself to the work of saving himself and friends.

The pump worked almost noiselessly, and as the water, which overcame the buoyant effort of the structure, was gradually forced from the reservoir beneath by the double-action machine, the submarine cabin began to rise toward the surface. Nothing was more evident of this fact than the cries of dismay and baffled triumph that rose from the lips of the red-skins. Their blows upon the tubes ceased, but were resumed upon the sides of the plated structure with the fury of demons.

The cabin continued to rise rapidly, and in ten minutes' time had reached its line of flotation. Then the faucet and stop-cock were closed, and Neptune's labor was done for the time being.

They had now escaped drowning no doubt to encounter another death more horrible at the hands of the red barbarians thundering at the door. But Seth and the old man resolved to sell their lives dearly, and with revolvers in hand stood ready for the worst.

Pushing aside one of the panels that protected a window, Neptune thrust a revolver through the glass and opened a deadly fire upon the foe, driving them beyond range around the angle of the building. This he repeated, with the assistance of Seth, upon the other sides, and to their happy surprise the enemy was compelled to beat a retreat shoreward with serious loss. They had, however, gained a partial victory. They had unraveled the mystery of the submarine hut, and inflicted such damage upon it as would prevent its being sunk with impunity again. The windows were shattered, and in several places the wall had been battered and hacked until daylight was visible through it. In fact, the floating cabin of Neptune was almost a wreck.

The men went out upon the porch and gazed around them. A shout of triumph greeted them from the western shore, and the presence of the Boy Brigade evoked an answer from the lips of Neptune and Seth. Old Joyful Jim came close to the water's edge and shouted aloud to those upon the craft; but Satan himself seemed to have sent his imps broadcast throughout the Black Wood, and before answer could be given back, a horde of red-skins put the Brigade to flight.

"It seems as though we are all doomed to certain destruction," said the old man, gravely, seriously.

"Yes; those red-skins will give us no peace as long as we are upon this craft," answered Seth,

"therefore I would suggest that we leave it under cover of the coming night."

"But, my boy," replied Neptune, "you will not have strength to endure a long, laborious flight. You are thin and pale as a sheet."

"I know I have suffered the loss of strength and blood; but I think I could stand a forced march to the Agency."

"Perhaps," replied Neptune, gazing away like one plunged in deep deliberation; "therefore we must avail ourselves of the shadows of the coming night, as you suggest, Seth, and get away."

With this understanding, the little party made preparations for flight.

Soon after darkness had fully set in, Neptune and his party began their retreat. By means of a long pole, the raft was set in motion by the old man. They moved slowly toward the western shore, the nearest point to land. It was their intention to approach the shore as near as possible, then take to the rubber boats.

Suddenly two canoes shot alongside of them, and a dozen dusky figures in the boats became visible to the eyes of old Neptune who was on the lookout for danger.

Turning, he sprang into the cabin and closed the door after him. A yell rose in the night, fiendish and jarring. Blows fell upon the cabin thick and furious. Another attack had begun.

"My God, we are attacked again!" shouted old Neptune, growing furious.

A cry of despair escaped the maiden's lips.

The light inside was at once put out, the windows opened, and a random firing began upon the foe; but with little success. The darkness favored the enemy.

In the midst of the tumult of the attack a shrill cry resembling that of a beaver was heard to come from out upon the lake.

Seth, who stood near the window, recognized it as the cry of Justin Gray, the Beaver, and at once gave an answering signal.

Then from other directions rose the sharp bark of a fox, the howl of a wolf, the scream of a panther, and the hoot of an owl.

There was a lull in the attack as these sounds issued through the night. By bitter experience the savages had learned their import.

"Glory!" exclaimed Seth, beside himself, "the Boy Brigade is near."

The savages resumed the attack on the cabin all the more furious. They cut and hacked away until suddenly a yell of agony from one of them caused the whole party to suspend operations.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed when another warrior tumbled into the water with a frightful scream of agony, and as no shot had been fired from the interior of the cabin, the savages knew that a new and silent enemy had appeared upon the scene of action. Silence was imposed upon the party, and all listened with bated breath. A savage advanced to the edge of the platform in front of the cabin, and leaning forward, peered down at the water. He caught the outlines of a black, spherical object lying upon the surface of the lake not ten feet from him; but before he could make his discovery known, the object raised slightly and thrust forward a long slender rod with a sharp lance-point which entered his throat, completely severing the windpipe. A half-moan, half-cry, mingled with a horrible gurgling, gasping sound, followed, and the doomed red-skin went overboard into a watery grave.

Something of the truth now began to enter the wild brains of the over-triumphant warriors and it at once became necessary for them to act upon the defensive. They beat a hasty retreat from the vicinity, leaving their wounded and dead on the platform of the Neptune.

Among the latter was discovered Isaac Le Clercq, who was foremost in this most sanguine onslaught. He had at last met a just fate.

No sooner was the flight of the Indians an assured

fact, ere a shout of triumph went up from the water around the cabin, and a moment later, the Boy Brigade, together with Mr. Harris, Jolly Jim, Gus Stewart, Ches Pagan and Rube Johnson—whom the Brigade had found on the island, and convinced that Sure Shot Seth was not dead—climbed upon the cabin platform where they were heartily greeted.

The meeting between Mr. Harris and his daughter was most affecting. "Boys," said Seth after congratulations and greetings were over, "you have saved us this time, but we must get away from here."

"Yes, and the sooner you leave the better," added Gray.

"My son," said Neptune, "we are all ready to depart—in fact were making shore for that purpose when the red barbarians attacked us. I will proceed to launch my canoes at once, of which I have enough to carry the entire party."

In a few moments Neptune had launched his rubber boats alongside the platform and placed a few articles of food and clothing in there. Then they all bid a last farewell to the submarine hut and entered the boats.

Justin Gray and his companions led the way; Seth and his fair friend came next, while Neptune and Jolly Jim brought up the rear.

Slowly and silently they made their way to the northern end of the island, keeping a vigilant eye upon the shore for the red-skins, but the latter were nowhere to be seen; they had left the vicinity for good.

Crossing the island, they again embarked in their light canoe—which they had carried across—and made their way rapidly toward the Yellow Medicine Agency.

To their horror they found it deserted, and thinking that the settlers had taken refuge at Fort Ripley—that being the nearest point of safety—they at once set out for that place, which they finally reached in safety, and where they found all the settlers of the Yellow Medicine Agency.

On the way to the fort Old Neptune revealed his right name and the place of his home; and while his sojourn in the wilds of the Northwest had, in the end, been full of great peril and suffering, he did not regret that he had come, for he had been restored to his wonted health and strength.

With the cloud that had once seemed gathering over his powerful brain went all his eccentric notions of submarine navigation; though to have followed up what he had accomplished at Lake Luster might have led to a success and fame equal to that of George Stephenson and Robert Fulton.

Upon one other point the Boy Brigade was enlightened; and that was the queer and even suspicious manner in which Jolly Jim deported himself while around Lake Luster. The fact is, old Jim was in the employ of Neptune as a scout, and secrecy being enjoined upon him, of course he kept it to himself. It was Jim and Neptune that released him from the log.

Old Neptune and his daughter soon returned to their old home.

Mr. Harris took his daughter south, beyond all dangers of Indian invasion, where, in company with her friend, Emma Milbank, and the other women of the Yellow Medicine Agency, she spent the summer, while he went back to fight under the banner of her lover, Sure Shot Seth.

The Boy Brigade rendered inestimable service during the terrible Minnesota war, and although it was in many hard-fought battles, and lost some of its members, its gallant young leader, Sure Shot Seth, passed through the hottest of all unscathed, to fall meekly into the ranks of married men, and become one of the most devoted of husbands to one of the most devoted and charming of wives—Maggie Harris.

THE END.

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